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OF LIFE

G. CAMPBELL MORGAN

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The True Estimate of Life and How to Live

By

G. Campbell Morgan

Author of "The Spirit of God," "God's Methods with Man," "A Twentieth Century Message," etc.

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Paul's Estimate of Life.

CHAPTER I.

Paul's Estimate of Life.

In the history of the Christian church perhaps no man, upon whom the eyes of the world have been fixed, has so wondrously fulfilled in character and conduct the ideal of Christianity as did the Apostle Paul. Most of us will agree that he realized more fully than any man of his own time the purposes of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. His life and teaching have revealed the meaning and Christianity in a way accomplished by no other life or teaching. It is very interesting in his letter to the Philippians, one of his later epistles, to find him writing of himself, and yet of himself principally in the new life, which he had then been living for about three and thirty years. He writes with human tenderness, of human sensibilities, and human thoughts, while yet upon all there rests the light of the divine, and through all there is manifested the power that has taken possession of him.

In this epistle, written to his children in

the faith at Philippi, it is very evident that he writes under the stress of circumstances. Not that circumstances are causing him one moment's anxiety, but they are such as to compel him to face the alternative possibilities which lie just ahead of him. It is while in this condition that he writes this letter and condenses into one swift burning sentence an epitome of Christianity as he has realized it: "To me to live is Christ."

To this man, all the marvelous unfoldings of the doctrine and scheme of redemption can be condensed and expressed in the simplest of words. He tells the whole story of his own experience of Christianity when he writes, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. i. 21). To him Christianity is Christ.

> "Christ! I am Christ! and let the name suffice you,
> Ay, for me, too, He greatly hath sufficed;
> Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
> Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."

This statement of the apostle's view of Christianity gathers force when we remember the circumstances under which he wrote it. He was a prisoner in charge of the Prætorian guard. He was waiting, most probably, for the final word of the emperor, which should

decide in which of two ways his pathway should lie. If the emperor's command be given, the apostle will tread the road through the door of his prison, through the city to the place of execution, and then, by one swift, sudden stroke, his life will end. He looks along that road and thinks of the possibility of traversing it. Then he looks in the other direction. Suppose that the emperor command that he be set at liberty. Then back to Philippi he will speed to see his children, and on to some new region to tell the same story and live the same life and win more trophies for Christ. He looks at these two roads stretching before him, and he says:

"To live—is Christ, and to die—is gain. I am in a strait betwixt two. I desire to depart, and yet for your sakes I would tarry a little longer."

Life and death have lost their old significance to him, because there is one vision that fills the horizon whether he look this way or that. Here it is Christ, and there it is gain, and gain is Christ, and Christ is gain. There is no darkness but only light, for everywhere he sees the Master. That is Christianity.

Now, beloved, I want to take that estimate of Christian life and meditate upon it for a little while. Do not expect me to exhaust it, for in this text lie all the possibilities and potentialities of the Christian life.

"To me to live is Christ." What did the apostle mean? There are seven things which he might have meant. By these words he intended to say that:

1. Christ was the author of his life. It was as though he had written, "To me to live at all is Christ."

2. Christ was the sustainer of his life. "To me to continue to live is Christ."

3. Christ was the law of his life. "The conditions in which I live my life are summed up in Christ."

4. Christ was the product of his life. "To me to live is to reproduce Christ."

5. Christ was the aim and influence of his life. "To me to live is to lead men to Christ."

6. Christ was the impulse of his life. "To me to live is to be swept along under the compassion of the Christ."

7. Christ was the finisher, the crown of his life. "To me to live is at last to be what

he is, and to find the crowning of all my manhood in him."

Christ the end, as Christ was the beginning. Christ the beginning, and therefore Christ the end. Whether this man looked back upon the past, at the present, or into the future, within or without, behind, above, or beyond to the consummation—wherever he turned his eyes, he saw Jesus only.

The first thought is that when Paul wrote these words, "To me to live is Christ," he meant to say, "Christ is the author of my life."

This man did not count that he had any life except the life which was named "Christ." He began to reckon his life only from the day when Christ was born within him through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the life of this man, there is one clean line, dividing it about at its center. Behind that line is the old life, the "old man," to which he so often referred, while on the other side of the line is the new life, the "new man." To Paul, the crossing of that line was something that went to the very depths of his being. It transformed him so that in looking back to the days when he became a new man in Christ, he said of the

old days, "Old things are passed away." They had all vanished out of his sight. He took no account of anything that was behind him, and he said, "All things are become new," and in the new things he lived. The years that he spent on the earth, prior to the moment when Jesus found him, he did not reckon as worth speaking of for a single moment.

Was Paul not mistaken? Had not very much of value been crowded into the years before his conversion? Stop him for a moment and ask him:

"Paul, what do you mean by this? You lived a very remarkable life before you met Jesus of Nazareth. You had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. You had all the advantages of learning and religion. You had never been a profligate. Your life had been straight and pure, clean through. You were a Pharisee of the Pharisees, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. In all outward seeming, and what is infinitely more, in all inward sincerity, you had been a remarkable man."

"Perfectly true; but the things I counted gain, I now count but dross."

"Why?"

"In comparison with what I found, when Christ found me. When I turned my back upon the old, I did it forever, because my face was set toward the new."

I do not think this man ever had five minutes' questioning as to whether he ought to go back into that old life once a week for enjoyment, and live the new life all the remainder of the week as a duty. The old life *passed away*, and the new life opened before him bright with joy, thrilling with delights, expanding all the way.

The apostle's new life began when there shone a light round about him on the way to Damascus. We learn so much by contrast. Look at him for a moment on the way to Damascus. Remember that he was straight, upright, moral, righteous, sincere to the core of his being; and on his way to Damascus he carried in his hand some very important documents—letters from the high priest. What for? Because in Damascus there was a little company of men and women who were daring to slight the religion of their fathers, singing hymns about this Jesus, Whom the friends of Paul had crucified. If they should go on singing their hymns they would soon under-

mine the national religion, and Paul was going to put an end to it. So he was riding with the priest's letters in his possession, when a light from heaven fell, and a voice from heaven spoke. Paul fell to the ground, and the man upon the earth said in answer to the voice from heaven:

"Who art Thou, Lord?"

The revelation that came to him must have been the most startling in his life: "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest."

Now hear the next word and never forget it:

"LORD!"

What a change! Why, this man has joined the church at Damascus before he arrives there! That is all they are doing, calling Jesus Lord, and Paul has done it. Do you not see the radical nature of this change? Do you not see that he has taken the crown of his life from off his own head and has put it on the head of Jesus?

"Lord,"—and what else? "What wilt Thou have me to do?"

That is henceforth the keynote of his life. The music is true to it through all the future; through missionary journeyings, through perils

by land and by sea, in prison and among robbers, when suffering persecutions or preaching the gospel of the grace of God, he is always true to the keynote which he struck when he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" There his life began. There the old life dropped away, and the new life opened before him; and looking back to that beginning from the jail in Rome, he writes:

"To me to live is Christ."

Life began there, and we may judge how real the change was by asking him a question, which I often think I shall want to ask him when by God's grace I meet him in the glory:

"Paul, you have not forgotten the ride to Damascus?"

"No, I still remember the hour of my apprehending by the Lord."

"But, Paul, *what did you do with the high priest's letters?*"

Did you ever think of that? I shall want to know some day. They went clean out of his life like everything else of the old life. Old things passed away.

That is when Paul began to live. When is your birthday, my brother? Let me say

something for the sake of those who say, "I cannot find my birthday." By a question like that, some trembling soul may be unsettled. The devil is only too glad to take hold of anything whereby he may unsettle any one. If the devil says to you, "You haven't had any birthday," treat him as I do and say, "If I never had one, I will have one now." If Satan is so very particular about a definite date, take this one and say to God right now:

> "Here I give my all to thee,
> Friends and time and earthly store;
> Soul and body, Thine to be,
> Wholly Thine forever more."

The Master says, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." We have the date, and any "now" will do; so we will dismiss the devil and pass on. The point is that there is a passing into the new life and a turning of the back upon the old. "To me to live is Christ." Blessed fact of regeneration, to which we owe everything that comes after it! All the new possibilities which God offers to us are the result of the fact that the Master arrested us and gave us His life, so that old things passed away and all things became new.

But Paul means infinitely more. He means also, "To me to continue to live is Christ." Three and thirty years, or thereabouts, he has been following Jesus, and the music of his life has been running on amid earth's lamentations. The harmonies have been varied, but that has always been the chord of the dominant.

But what does he mean when he says that to him "to continue to live is Christ"?

It is a confession on the part of this man of his own helplessness. He says:

"Here I am after three and thirty years, by the grace of God. I am still living the same life that then began."

"But how?"

"Christ. I have not kept Him; He has kept me. I have not clung to the cross; the Man of the cross has clung to me, which is infinitely better. He has sustained my life during these three and thirty years."

Beloved in Christ, do we sufficiently grasp that great truth for ourselves? Weak, trembling men and women, who have started the Christian life, are crying and wondering how they will hold out. If it is left to you, I will not expect to meet you in the Christian path-

way twelve months hence. If it is left to me, I will be a castaway very shortly.

You remember that wonderful figure from the lips of Jesus recorded in the Gospel by John. There Christ says that He is not only the author but the sustainer of life. "I am the vine, ye are the branches." Paraphrase that; put it into other words so as to bring out the inner thought. People have an idea that Jesus meant to say: "I am the main stem of the vine, and you are the branches grafted into Me. Through Me, the main stem, all the forces of life pass into you the branches."

That is very beautiful, but Jesus meant something infinitely stronger.

What did he say? "I am"—not the main stem—"I am *the vine*." What is the vine? Root, main stem, branches, leaves, tendrils, fruit—everything. That is the vine. People speak as though the main stem alone was the vine, held up by roots and expressing itself in branches. That is true in a sense, but I like to take this word of Christ's in its simplicity, and therefore in its sublimity. "I am the vine"—the whole of it. What does this mean? "Ye are the branches—part of the vine—and the life of the branch is the life of

the vine." In a sense the vine gives its life to the branch, but not as a separate thing. The branch is part of the vine, and the very life that courses through the branch and reproduces itself in fruit is the life of the vine. "To me to live is Christ." His life it is, that sustains me. It is He Himself in me. I am His; He is mine. We are one by a solemn union, a union infinitely beyond anything that metaphor or figure can teach, one with each other, and by that fact of our oneness my life has been sustained. "To me to live is Christ."

I love this third thought: "To me to live is Christ. Christ is the condition of my life; Christ is the law of my life."

That is why Paul was angry with the Galatians. He said to them:

"O foolish Galatians, ye ran well; who hath hindered you?"

How did he say they had been hindered? They were getting back under legalism, into the place where they continually said, "Thou shalt not" and "Thou shalt"; and where they were bringing everybody up to the test of forbiddings and permissions, and asking for a rule for everything. Paul said:

"You ran well; what hath hindered you? How is it you are so soon entangled with the yoke of bondage?"

How is it with you, Paul?

"To me to live is *Christ;* not a set of rules, but a life principle within me; not the conditioning of my days by time-tables and maxims and rules, but the ever-present Christ stretching to the farthest territory of my being, and by His presence there ordering all my life within the bounds of His own sacred will."

Paul lived in the new covenant of which Jeremiah spoke, the covenant in which the law should be written no longer upon the table of stone outside a man's personality, but on his heart, so that if a man wanted to know what God would have him do, he need go to no temple, to no priest, to no altar, to no code of rules. He need but to turn himself to silence and quietness and say:

> "O strong life of God in Christ within me,
> Direct, control, suggest this day
> All I design, or do, or say,
> That all my powers with all their might,
> In thy sole glory may unite."

The man that lived there had a fresh code of ethics every morning, a new list of regula-

tions every moment; and all these came along the impulse of the Christ-life within him. Christ is the law of my life; He conditions my days; He is the author, the sustainer, and the law.

Again, it is as though this man had said: "Christ is the product of my life. To me to live *is* Christ."

But if a man says that, and there is no manifestation of it, who believes him? Not I. And I am quite sure that this man did not want any one to believe him unless it was perfectly evident in his life.

Suppose that here is a man living a life that is selfish and malicious and proud and critical and unkind, and he says:

"To me to live is Christ."

O man, do not blaspheme! Your life is selfish, your life is malicious, your life is critical, your life is unkind; was Jesus any of these?

"Oh, no," he says, "I do not mean that. I mean that I have accepted His creed."

Never! No man ever really accepted the creed who did not get the Christ first. The creed grows out of the living Christ; and when that is so, the creed is forever manifesting itself in conduct.

Do you not see, beloved, the necessity for this? Nature, so far as we understand it, always reproduces itself true to type. I remember the last season in which I put flowers in my garden in Birmingham. I went down to a shop and bought some bulbs, because I wanted a fine show of tulips in the earlier days of the year. I put them all carefully in my garden. I even arranged them according to a color scheme, and in geometrical precision. I almost dreamed of the result, for I love God's flowers, though I do not understand them. The winter went; spring came, and the bulbs came up, but they were crocuses. Why? Because I had planted crocus bulbs. I thought I had a bargain, and the result was, that what I had sowed that I reaped.

Now work out that great principle of life and apply to this question of sainthood. If the life implanted in you is the life of Christ, that must reproduce itself true to type. If a man has not quit singing, "I want to be an angel," he is on a sorry business, because he has not even a promise of wings anywhere on him. But if a man is singing reverently, with strong crying and tears and earnest desire,

"I want to be like Jesus," that is possible. Why? Because the life he lives, if he is born again, is the Christ-life, and if the life of Christ be implanted within him, it will in its own outworking, reproduce itself, and he will, individually as well as with the Church, grow up into Him in all things which is the head, even Christ.

Let us endeavor to understand this better by looking at two illustrations from Paul's life.

We saw him just now on the way to Damascus. I have the profoundest admiration for Saul of Tarsus before he was converted. I love a man who is sincere and out and out in anything. But do you see what Paul's sincerity did for him in those old days? It made him say, in effect:

"I am sincere, and I am determined that the religion of my God shall be *the* religion. If men will not bow to it, then I will hail them to prison, and to death. My sincerity arouses my indignation, and I am determined to smite to death the men who will not abide by that which is a divinely revealed religion."

There he is, a magnificent man, the best that human nature can ever do for a man apart from Jesus Christ. Do not forget it.

There has nothing finer been brought out of fallen human nature than Saul of Tarsus before Christ found him.

Thirty years have gone, and now we see him before Agrippa and his friends, who desire to amuse themselves by looking at this strange man, and hearing what he has to say. Paul gives his testimony, tells the story of how Jesus found him and transformed him. Agrippa looking at him, said not, "Almost thou persuadest," but with scorn:

"*With a very little* would you persuade me to be a Christian?"

What does Paul say? Is he any less sincere and consecrated than he was when he rode to Damascus? No. Is he less enthusiastic? No. Is there any difference? Yes, a vast difference! How does he show it? Manacles are on his wrists, and chains upon his ankles, but he looks into the face of Agrippa and says:

"O King Agrippa, I wish that, not with a very little, but that altogether thou wast such as I am, except these bonds. I do not want you to wear my chains, Agrippa. Have my Christ, have my light, have my life, but I would not put these on even you, Agrippa."

Do you see any change in the man? Perfectly sincere thirty years ago, but if you did not agree with him he would put you to death. Perfectly sincere now, but with an entirely changed tone:

"O King Agrippa, if you could only change places with me without having my chains; but I would not harm or pain you for a moment!"

If a man lives Christ, he reproduces Christ. Is not that what Paul has done? Are not his words the living echo of that most wondrous prayer of all, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do"? Men always in some measure reproduce Christ when they live His life. If the Christ-life is present it must come out through the glory on the face, and the tenderness of the touch, and the new love for everybody. The very best testimony that you can ever give to the power of Jesus Christ is to live His life over again, not in your own effort, but by the propulsion of that same life within you. "For me to live is to reproduce Christ."

Let me mention the other points briefly. "To me to live is to influence men toward Christ. The *aim* of my life is Christ."

Do you think that many of those soldiers that were fastened to Paul got away without being influenced for Christ? I do not. Every soul he came into contact with was an opportunity; and all his life, so far as active service went, was poured out in the doing of this one thing: the bringing of men who had never seen the Christ into the place where they might see Him; and the building up of those who had seen Him in their most holy faith from height to height, and from glory unto glory. The whole aim and influence of his life was Christ.

Again, the *impulse* of his life was Christ.

I use the word "impulse" in reference to the great force behind it, which impelled him to service. Take one illustration. You know the epistle to the Romans,—that is, you know where it is. Well, read it again. You have never fathomed it yet. I am just beginning to see light upon it, beauteous gleams of glory on it. Chapter five, justification; six, the question of sin; seven, that question still discussed; eight, no condemnation, the larger, purer life; nine, what there? Well, do not read the ninth without reading the last verses of the eighth. What is the highest

height of experience in the eighth? "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I always think of the apostle here as on some mountain eminence, looking at his enemies. They are all around him—death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present; and then his imagination sweeps him into all the infinite possibilities of the future—things to come, height, depth, or any other creation. There they all are, the possibilities of danger. He says, "I am persuaded that none of them shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus." There he is at the height of vision, the height of experience.

What next? "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow."

Why, the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth verses of the eighth chapter do not sound like that! They are a shout of triumph, "Noth-

ing can separate me from His love, but I have great heaviness and continual sorrow."

What about? About himself? No; self had perished in the struggle of these preceding chapters. What about? "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." What is that? That is, "To me to live is Christ. The impulse of my life is the Christ-impulse. The passion that brought Him down to redeem men, consumes me, and when I have touched the highest height of His life so that I know that nothing can separate me from His love, then I have learned the deepest experience of all, that of fellowship in His suffering, and I wish I could be accursed." Jesus Himself was made a curse for us, and Paul is living the Christ-life, so that he can say,

"Oft, when the Word is on me to deliver,
Lifts the illusion and the truth lies bare,
Desert or throng, the city or the river,
Melts in a lucid paradise of air.
Only like souls I see the folk thereunder
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings,
Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder,
Sadly contented in a show of things;

Then with a rush the intolerable craving
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call,
Oh, to save these, to perish for their saving,
Die for their life, be offered for them all!"

Let commentators cease their foolish attempts to explain away those verses. Paul has come nearer to Jesus Christ here than ever before. This impulse of the Christ-life which wrought redemption for the race at the cost of His own life enters a human soul, and floods it to overflowing, until he says:

"I could wish that even I were accursed for my brethren's sake."

What is the last thing? *Christ is the crown.* He is not only the author; He is the finisher. He not only began; He will end the good work.

And when it ends, what is it? Christ. What is the music of the land to come? Christ. What the fellowship? Christ, and Christ reproduced in the saints. What will be my chief joy when I look again in the face of my child who has gone before me and is to wait for me in the shining city? It will be that she is like Jesus. Not only shall we see Christ Himself, but Christ reproduced in the loved ones.

Imagination is sometimes ahead of truth. Poetry guesses at more than prose ever fathoms. Follow out the thought, and everywhere, on the throne, and amid the multitudes, what see you? Christ. That is why this man Paul stands and notwithstanding Nero's threatened axe, says:

"To die is gain."

"Do you not see that executioner, Paul?"

"No, I do not see him."

"What do you see?"

"Christ! To die is gain."

Now let me ask you to finish this theme for yourself. Imagine that you have in your hand a clean piece of paper, and write on it for yourself—God help you!—take the pencil and write! Write the story of your life, honestly, faithfully, truly, in as brief a sentence as Paul wrote the story of his. Write:

"To me to live is—money."

Now, be honest, in God's name. If you have played the hypocrite before, do not do it now. Write it down, not for man's eyes, but for God's. "To me to live is money." If that is true, put it down.

"To me to live is pleasure."

"To me to live is fame."

Oh, fill them in for yourself!

Now you have it written, your life's story. You never looked it squarely in the face like that before. There it is, right in front of you, the self-evident truth, the inner meaning of all your life.

Now finish it. Write under it what Paul did. That is your estimate of life; now add Paul's estimate of death:

"To me to live is money; to die is—I cannot write 'gain' after that. To die is *loss*. I shall leave it all. Naked came I out of my mother's womb; naked shall I return thereunto."

"To me to live is pleasure; to die—oh! do not talk to me about death! It is the last thing I want to think about. I want my pleasure, my laughter, this hollow crackling of thorns under a pot; 'tis all I have! Let me have it, but in God's name do not talk about death. Why, man, I do not like to walk down the street in the dark because I think of death. I cannot write that."

"To me to live is fame." Now, finish it. "And to die—no, I cannot. For if they put my name on a marble monument, directly it is erected, nature, with mossy fingers, will

begin to pull it down. I cannot write that. To die is to perish, to be forgotten! What is fame when I am gone? I cannot write it."

No, beloved, and you cannot write Paul's estimate of death after anything except Paul's estimate of life. If, by God's great grace, you can write, "To me to live is Christ," you can write, "To die is gain." To die is to see Him more clearly, to be closer to Him, to enter into larger service for Him, to touch the height and the depth and the length and the breadth of His life; "to die is gain." You can only write it if you write the first.

Somebody else says: "Well, I have never written the first; can I start?"

Yes.

"Where can I start?"

Where he started.

"Where did he start?"

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" That is it. Will you say that?

"Yes, we will do it. Is it easy?"

No, it is not easy. The cross is there, crucifixion is there, the ending of self is there, the abandoning of everything, of hope, and wife, and child, and home, and friends, and ambition, all is there. "Lord—I have had

other lords—Lord, I have been governed by self, I have been governed by human loves, I have been mastered by passions, I have been swept along by ambitions; Lord, Nazarene, depose these other lords and be King."

That is the place to begin; and there is not a man or woman who begins there honestly to whom He will not come with healing on His wings, the sun rising; then the old things for you shall pass away, and all things shall become new.

Health of Spirit.

CHAPTER II.

Health of Spirit.

Holiness is simply another word for health, both being derived from the old Anglo-Saxon word *halig*, meaning whole and complete. It would be perfectly correct to speak of a holy body and a healthy spirit, but we have come to speak of bodily holiness as health, and of spiritual health as holiness. Holiness is not maturity, it is not finality; it is rather a condition for growth into maturity and unto finality.

In the third chapter of Philippians we have a brief autobiographical sketch of the apostle Paul. He first makes mention of the old life in which he formerly had confidence, and in which he still might have confidence, did he continue to measure things by the standards of the flesh. Then he goes on to declare that the things that had been gain to him, he counted loss for Christ. Notice he says:

"Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I *counted* loss for Christ. Yea, verily, and I *count* all things to be loss for the

excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

In the past, on the way to Damascus, he *counted* loss, the things in which he had prided himself, in that moment when he surrendered himself, absolutely, with all his hopes, and aspirations, and prejudices—everything—to Christ, and said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Now, over thirty years later he writes that he still *counts* all things but loss. He has not abandoned the position which he took up so long ago, and it is because he is in the same position that he is still in the place of blessing and power. Yet he is not satisfied.

What more is he seeking? For answer to this question let us look at two statements which follow. First, "Not that I have already obtained or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be, that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus." Then, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye are otherwise minded, even this shall God reveal unto you." In these two statements we find the word "perfect" so used as to suggest a contradiction. In the first he declares he is not perfect. In the second he

claims to be perfect. These words "perfect" in the original are not identical. The first statement may be read: "Not that I have already obtained or am already *perfected*." And the second: "Let us therefore, as many as be *perfect*." The difference between being perfected and being perfect is the difference between maturity of Christian life and holiness, the difference between the condition that is a present possibility and the condition which can never be attained until the Lord shall come and fashion anew the body of humiliation, and conform it to the body of His glory. I shall be perfected when I see Him as He is; my whole nature, even this body shall then be transformed into perfect likeness to Himself. I never can be perfected here, but I can be perfect in the sense of whole, healthy, holy.

The apostle uses the figure of a race to illustrate the Christian life, and what he says I think may be paraphrased in this way: "I am not yet perfected, I am not yet crowned; that for which my Lord apprehended me, was not this place of temptation and conflict, but the brightness of the joyful day when He will present me—whom He found so low down—

in the very presence of God, faultless as He Himself is faultless. That is the goal of my running, and the crowning point to which I have not yet attained; but let us, therefore, as many as be perfect—as many of us as are running the race in the strength and energy of the Holy Spirit, with every weight and sin laid aside, and with the very joy and love of God possessing us." We can be perfect thus. It is the difference between the crown upon the brow, and the passionate attitude of life which has the crown in view, and forgetting all that is behind, presses toward it with full and complete purpose of life.

That condition of life is the condition of health of spirit before God, it is the condition of perfection in the present moment, and it is a condition which ought to mark every child of God from the moment of conversion.

The blossom upon the tree is perfect, beautifully perfect, but it is not perfected. It is not consummated; it is not mature. It needs the ministry of sun, and shower, and atmosphere, to ripen it into perfection. Not until the fires of autumn have acted on it, and it stands in all the glory of perfect fruit, will it be perfected.

Put a child of six months by the side of a man of forty; what a difference! They are both perfect, but the man is perfected with the perfection of maturity, while the child is not.

In order to the realization of this perfection of health it is first necessary to remember that holiness is the work of God in the life of the believer. To emphasize this let us take three or four passages of Scripture.

Philippians ii. 12, 13: "So, then, my beloved, ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

"It is GOD." I am to work out what God works in, and I can never work out any more than God works in. It is only when we see this that we come into the place of health and blessing.

I. Thessalonians v. 23, 24: "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, Who will also do it." "*Who will also do it.*" It is not we who must pre-

serve blameless these three great departments of our being; it is GOD Who alone is equal to this, and all we have to do is to fall back upon Him and realize that it is His work.

Hebrews xiii. 20, 21: "Now the God of peace, Who brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, with the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to Whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen." Notice that the power that is to sanctify is the power that brought again the Lord Jesus from among the dead. The one impossible thing in all the ages was the resurrection of a man from the dead, but the whole fabric of Christianity rests upon the accomplishment of that very thing, and the stupendous power that brought Him from the dead is the power that is to bring about my sanctification and my perfection. It is dependent not upon my poor feeble attempts, but upon the force of God Who brought from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 24, 25: "Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling and to

set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion, and power before all time, and now, and forever more. Amen." The true rendering is, "keep you from *stumbling*," not only from falling down. And what else? "To present you not only blameless, but *faultless*, before the presence of His glory." There is the perfect and the perfected. We are perfect because He keeps us from stumbling; we shall be perfected because He will present us faultless before the presence of His glory. The forgiveness of my sins at the cross depends upon Him, the power that heals and keeps me whole depends upon Him, my sanctification hour by hour depends upon Him, my final presentation before the presence of His glory depends upon Him. Just in proportion as we see that HE is to do this, in that proportion do we come into the place of blessing.

But while it is His *work*, the responsibility rests on me, that I be in the place in which God can do that work, that I am in the attitude to which He will respond with His power.

That attitude is declared in II Corinthians vi. 17, 18:

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

That is the attitude of separation and renunciation. God does not call us to renounce the great underlying principle of sin, for we cannot. God cleanses from that. But He does call us to the renunciation of sin as something which we commit of our own free will.

There are three phases of such sin:

First, "Sin is lawlessness." This definition of sin is perhaps the profoundest of all, including as it does both the underlying principle, and the outwardly expressed activity. I am using it now, however, only in the sense of wilful action. (I John iii. 4.) Every one believes that. It is the simple, every-day definition of sin. In other words, sin is wrongdoing.

Second, "To him, therefore, that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James iv. 17.) Sin is neglecting to do right.

A great many heartily agree with the correctness of the first definition, but not with the second. A great many are prepared to admit that sin is wrongdoing, but have not learned that the omission of anything, no matter how simple, which is due to our Christian profession, is sin.

Third, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans xiv. 23.) This definition goes deeper still. If there comes into my life as a Christian a question as to whether some action is right or wrong, and I continue it, while yet doubtful concerning it, I am sinning, because my action is "not of faith."

Scores of young believers, if they could only see and believe that, would be saved from asking many questions. They ask:

"Is it right for me to go here or there, to do this or that?"

Now, the fact that the question arises proves that, at least for the present, it is *wrong*. The moment you are doubtful about a certain course of action your solemn duty is to cease that action. In the doing of that doubtful thing there is actual sin against God. There may be something which has been perfectly legitimate for you thus far, but sud-

denly, in your own communion, in the midst of a piece of service for God, that thing appears in such new light as to cause you to say:

"I wonder if that is right?"

The moment the doubt is suggested, the only course open is to cease from doing that thing. In process of time you may be able to go back to it, because the doubt may be removed, but you cannot afford to let anything about which there is a suspicion of doubt stand between you and your personal communion with God. The moment you begin to do it you are in the region of sin.

We are called upon to-day, so far as our will is concerned, to say: "Lord, we will put away actual wrongdoing out of our lives. We will come into the place of quick and ready obedience; to Thy will, when Thou shalt make it known, anywhere, in our houses, in our habits, in our inward life, there shall be no resistance. We will cease doing anything about which we are doubtful."

And yet again. There is not only to be separation and renunciation, but there is to be the surrender of my whole being to God. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the

mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans xii. 1.)

No one word seems to convey all that is meant by surrender. "*Consecration*" is a blessed word, but people seem to have an idea that consecration means coming every now and then to give ourselves up to God anew. We cannot reconsecrate and reconsecrate, though we may repeatedly call to mind the perpetual fact of our consecration. The word that helps me more than any other as marking my attitude toward God is the word "*abandonment*." It is a mighty word filled with weakness. It indicates my falling back upon God.

"But what about consequences?"

I have nothing to do with consequences.

"But God may take me clean out of the place where I am."

I have nothing to do with that. Whether it is in China, India, America, England, or heaven, I do not care. That is surrender, that is abandonment, if I know anything about it. "Lord, do with me as Thou wilt, in all the relations of my life, in all the avenues of my being, everywhere and at all times."

"Present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Now by God's grace renounce sin, cut a clear line of separation between the old life and the new, so far as actual wrong is concerned, so far as the will is concerned. You cannot give up your wrongdoing unless you get the energy of God, but you cannot get the energy of God until you are willing to give up your wrongdoing. As long as you are clinging to sin, or neglecting what you ought to do, or doing doubtful things, you will not get God's blessing. Let the sin go, and cast yourself upon God.

And then what?

Believe. Abandon and believe—I do not know which comes first. They go together.

Some may say, "We will abandon, but we cannot trust."

Then you do not abandon. There is no value in standing on the edge of a sheet of ice and saying that it bears, while you will not go on it. Out on it, man! Believe and abandon yourself to Him in one great act. O my brother, longing as you are for holiness, will you quit your sin, and fall back upon God?

You cannot live the blessed life by your own effort, but you can if HE lives it in you by His own overwhelming grace. He has taught me that I nothing can, but HE all things can.

What a small thing will keep men and women from this blessed life! In 1895 I went to Douglas, on the Isle of Man, and in one of my afternoon meetings there came to me a young lady who said that all the joy had gone out of her life four years ago.

"Praise God," I said.

"What about?" said she.

"That you know when it went; because if you know when it went, you know how it went."

She said: "I do not think I do."

"Yes, you do; you are very definite about the time; now go back four years and tell me what happened."

She hung her head for a while, and I knew that something had happened.

"What was it?"

She replied: "I disagreed with my oldest friend. We were both Christians, and I wanted to tell her that I was wrong, but I did not, and she has gone away from the country."

"Well," I said, "it is at least evident that you know the reason of your failure."

"What am I to do?" she asked.

"Write to her and tell her that you were wrong; that is what the Master wanted you to do then."

"I cannot do that."

"You will never get back to the joy until you do."

She came all through that series of meetings and fought against God. She had all the knowledge of the blessed life that had come to her from her past experience, and yet was in darkness because she would not go back to the point of disobedience and be obedient.

The next year I went back to Douglas, and my first meeting was a meeting for workers. One of the first persons I spoke to was that young woman. The first thing I said to her was:

"You have sent that letter?"

She said, "Yes," and every line on her face convinced me that the joy had returned. She said: "I wrote it *last night!* I have been fighting God for twelve months about that letter, and all last week as I looked forward to this mission, I have been in hell, and

at last I said, 'O God, I cannot bear this any longer, I will give in.' I wrote that letter and sealed it and carried it at midnight and dropped it in the letter-box, and as that letter went into the box, heaven came back into my heart.''

Of course it did.

What is the little thing that is keeping heaven and God out of your heart, and all these blessings away from your soul? It is He that brings the cleansing and the light, but you must be obedient. I beseech you, attend to that upon which He has put His hand. Separate. Renounce sin. Step out upon God, and the healing and the blessing will come.

Naaman — or the Second "But."

CHAPTER III.

NAAMAN — OR THE SECOND "BUT."

"And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." (Luke iv. 27. R. V.)

I thank God that the New Testament comes after the Old, and that the words of Jesus light up for us that old-time story of Naaman the Syrian with great suggestiveness. From the words of the Master we find that Naaman had a second "but" in his life. We were introduced to the first one in the Old Testament, and it was full of sadness. He was a great man with his master; he was honorable; he was rich—BUT he was a leper! Now, Jesus says "there were many lepers in Israel, ... and none of them was cleansed BUT only Naaman." Naaman got into blessing. Naaman found a place where the leprosy passed absolutely out of his life. Sweetest word of all, it seems to me, in that story—"his flesh came again as the flesh of *a little child*."

The law of life in the physical realm, as revealed in the healing of Naaman, is the law of life in the spiritual realm. The Master confronts all those smitten with leprosy, the leprosy of sin; and He says to us: "Except ye turn and become as *little children* ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

I do not propose to dwell at any length upon the story of Naaman. It is familiar to us all. We know all its points and its beauties. My business is to find out how we may get the second "but" into our lives. We are all conscious that the first "but" is there—at least, if we are not, we shall never find our way into the second. We are all ready to say:

"It is quite true that we have almost unnumbered blessings, health, reason, friends, and countless mercies; BUT we are sinners."

The supreme question for every one of us is, how we may obtain the experience of the second "but," not theoretically, but actually, definitely, positively, that it may also be said of each of us: "BUT he was cleansed."

There is a very terrible revelation in the word which Jesus utters about Israel: "There were many lepers in Israel."

Lepers in Israel! Lepers among the children of the covenant! Men and women living right in the region of blessing and yet lepers. How absolutely and utterly useless was privilege to them, because they did not make use of it; because they did not take hold of the great blessing of God which was theirs as a nation, and in the covenant, and appropriate it to themselves! Yet this man outside of the covenant; this man who had not lived in the realm of privilege; this man who had not been brought up in the knowledge of the oracles of God; this man who knew nothing in his family or in his past history of the wonderful working power of the Most High; this outsider passed into blessing, while the men who were inside missed it!

The great truth that is impressed upon our minds from this thought is that it is not enough that you and I have been among the privileged people; it is not enough that we know the power of God; it is not enough that we have been brought up and nurtured in the fear of the Lord; there must be a personal appropriation of all the blessing presented to us in Christ, or else we miss the blessing. "And they shall come from the east and west,

and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God" while the children of the kingdom are "cast forth without." It is not enough that we know these things. We must do them.

I want to say a word first as to the need of every heart that has found the first "but" in their lives. Then a word as to the message of the Gospel to such needy hearts. And then I want to press home a final practical message.

I believe there is a general conviction of need. People generally agree that they need the pardon and the cleansing that Christ alone can bring; but I want, if I may, to analyse that general sense of need, and ask as through my own heart's experience:

"What do I need?"

I answer it by a threefold statement: (1) I need that something shall be done with regard to yesterday; (2) I need that something shall be done with regard to to-day; (3) I need that something shall be done with regard to to-morrow.

I need that something shall be done with regard to yesterday; for yesterday was the day of sin. The years that have passed have been years of wrongdoing, actual wrongdoing;

years of carnal, self-pleasing rebellion against God. What am I going to do with these years? Suppose that I now surrender myself to Christ, accepting His invitation,—what about the past? I need that something shall be done with the past, or else I can have no peace, no sense of purity, no blessing.

And then I know that something must be done in the present moment. Supposing it be possible to deal with the deeds of the past I shall still be the same being; still in my own nature there will be that which will propel me towards wrong, and towards sin, and therefore I shall still be unacceptable to God. I need forgiveness. I need also the consciousness of acceptance with God.

And then, when I have faced these two needs, if there be a message in the Gospel that shall meet my need as to the yesterday of my life, and the to-day of my life, I still have another need. I look out to the future. I see to-morrow coming on, with the same old forms of temptation, the same old suggestions to evil from without, and I reverently say that if God forgive me yesterday, and accept me to-day, yet am I helpless, unless He make some special provision for me to-morrow.

The general sense of the need is analysed for my own heart when I take this threefold outlook upon my life—yesterday, to-day, to-morrow. And what need I? I need first of all pardon for the past; I need that in the present moment purity shall be given to me in order that my nature shall be changed, and I shall be accepted with God; and for to-morrow I need power for all that may come. Pardon, purity, and power; pardon for yesterday; purity for to-day; power for to-morrow. I stand amid the years of my life, coming and going so swiftly that they seem to glide away before I know it, and I say:

"In the past I have sinned; I want pardon. In the present I am impure; can I have purity? And to-morrow—I dread it, because of my own weakness—can there be for me a power that shall come into my life, and energise me in the future?"

Now, is not this the Gospel that you have heard through all your lives? Is not every need thus expressed, met in the message that Jesus Christ sends to you again to-day?

What about the past? He meets you by His cross, and He says to you: "I will blot out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions."

Do you know what it is to blot out a transgression? Do you know what it is to have sin put away at the cross of Christ? He does it by His own blood-shedding.

But what is this blessing of the blotting out of sin?

A boy ran in to his mother one day after he had read that promise, "I will blot out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions." And he said:

"Mother, what does God mean when He says He will blot out my sins? What is He going to do with them? I can't see how God can really blot them out and put them away. What does it mean—blot out?"

The mother, who is always the best theologian for a child, said to the boy: "Didn't I see you yesterday writing on your slate?"

"Yes," he said.

"Well, show it to me."

He brought his slate to his mother, who holding it in front of him, said:

"Where is what you wrote?"

"Oh," he said, "I rubbed it out."

"Well, where is it?"

"Why, mother, I don't know."

"But how could you put it away if it was really there?"

"Oh, mother, I don't know. I know it was there, and it is gone."

"Well," she said, "that is what God meant when He said, 'I will blot out thy transgressions.'"

My brother, are you troubled about the past? Are sins of the past haunting you to-day? I do not ask you to make a list of them —you cannot do it; but I ask you to remember that the list is made. The whole black list of sins is before thee, and there comes thy way to-day the Man of sorrows and of tears, the Man of suffering and of triumph, and He says: "I will blot out thy transgressions." He will put across that list of thy sins His own pierced hand, and His own precious blood shall cleanse the page of all thy sins. It is His promise. He is able to promise because He has been into the darkness of His death, and out of that darkness He has brought authority by which He blots out the sin of the past, and puts it all away.

But I need more than that: I need purity; I need to know that I am accepted by God. And again He calls me to His cross, and at the cross He tells me that He will not only forgive sins, but cleanse from all unrighteous-

ness. He tells me that He will take my nature, and purify it, and make it like unto His own; and that in Him, and in the power of His life communicated to me, I shall be accepted of God.

But how may I know this?

On His oath, on His covenant, on His blood, I am to depend, and He says: "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out."

"Ah, but what about to-morrow? How am I going to manage to-morrow?"

The Master bends over the trembling soul that asks that question, and says: "Lo, I am with you always."

Some years ago, in Scotland, a Scotch lord gave to his old servant Donald, a little farm. He called him in one day and said:

"Donald, I am going to give you that farm, that you may work it for yourself, and spend the rest of your days there upon your own property."

Donald, with all the canniness that characterises a Scotchman, looked up into the face of his lord, and said to him:

"It is nae gude to gie me the farm; I have nae capital to stock it."

His lordship looked at him, and said: "Oh,

Donald, I think I can manage to stock it also."

And Donald said: "Oh, well, if it is *you and me* for it, I think we will manage."

Trembling soul, if Christ Jesus pardoned thee, if He purified thee, then say to Him:

"Now, Lord, I thank Thee for the pardon; I magnify Thee for the purity; but, Master, I have no capital; how am I going to live in the future?"

And He says: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? Lo, I am with you."

"Jesus, Master, if it be Thee and me for it, we can manage."

Thus far we have seen the need, and the provision: yesterday, pardon; to-day, purity; to-morrow, power. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; pardoning the past, purifying to-day, and energising for every moment of the pathway to glory.

Now we come to the point of actual dealing with God for ourselves. I cannot help you here, except to say what Naaman's servants said: "Try it." Even if you are very

weak and trembling and doubting, never mind. Try it. Venture on God. Take some risk in the matter. Two men in the life of Jesus came to Him—and one never can read the story of either without feeling how poor was the faith of each.

One said: "Lord if Thou wilt, Thou canst."

Don't you see, he wasn't perfectly sure that the Master was willing, but he ventured on Him. He came to Him on a crutch, because he could not walk straight, and the crutch was a little "if"—"*If* Thou wilt."

The other had to get another crutch, a crutch for the other side, and he said: "If Thou canst do something for my boy, do it." And how did the Master deal with this man? Did He say, "No, I cannot help you; your faith is not strong enough; you haven't confidence enough"? Not He. If a man got to Him, He didn't care. It is better for a man to come with, "Lord, Thou canst," "Thou wilt," and "I believe"; but if you cannot come that way, come the other way. Come with your "if." "Lord, if Thou canst make me clean, do it; only I come to Thee."

Do you remember those four leprous men that sat in the gate of the city of Samaria?

One of the most sensible committees that ever sat in the history of the world, was that committee of starvation. There in the city of Samaria famine stared them in the face. The host of the besieging army had cut the city off from supplies. The committee of four lepers held one of the only committee meetings I ever cared to attend; and I like to go there, and watch these men as, discussing the situation, they propose a resolution, and carry it. What is the resolution? Said they:

"What do we sitting here? If we go into the city we shall die. That is very evident. If we sit still here we shall die If we go down to the host of Syria, while they may save us alive, they may kill us. That is the outlook: first, certain death in the city; secondly, certain death sitting here; thirdly, half a chance of life down yonder. We move as a resolution that we turn our back upon the certain death in the city, certain death in the gateway, and venture upon the half chance of life down yonder."

Wasn't that a sensible thing for a committee to do? And you know how it worked. They took the half chance of life, and found

that it wasn't only a chance of life, but it was more abundant life, life for everybody except the men who didn't believe God could do it.

My brother, I want you to come to Jesus Christ that way now, if you feel that you cannot come any other way. It is certain death to go back to the old life. It is certain death to sit in the gateway sighing for virtue, and never finding it. You are not quite sure Jesus can do for you what He has done for others, but you think He may. Then try Him on the off chance! Venture on Him. Come to Him now and say:

"Lord, if Thou canst do anything with such as I am—Lord, I give myself to Thee!"

How will it work? Many a believer could tell you:

"I came to Jesus as I was—
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad."

Accept that testimony. Come, venture on Him.

How was it that Naaman nearly missed cleansing? Two things very nearly wrecked his faith. The first was: "Behold, I thought"—preconceived notions of how God was going to deal with him; and the second was: "Are

not Abana and Pharpar better than the Jordan?"—an attempt to dictate terms to God as to how he should get healed. First of all, he had an idea as to how God should work, and because God was not going to work that way, he nearly missed his blessing; and then he wanted to say that he knew a better way—Abana and Pharpar were better rivers than the muddy Jordan.

Thousands of souls have been wrecked upon one or other of those rocks at the entrance of the harbour of safety. "I thought"—what did you think? Did you think God was coming to wave over you some magician's wand, and give you some strange feeling? He never does. His way is the way of obedience. "To the Jordan! Dip seven times! To Christ, in absolute abandonment of self!" Along that line only comes His blessing. And the only way in which some men and women will ever get through into salvation or sanctification is to sweep out of their life, by a determined effort of their will, all preconceived notions, and to say:

"Oh, God, get Thy way, in Thy way, whatever I think."

The other danger is that we want to dic-

tate terms. That is so often done. I remember years ago conducting a mission, and at the back of the chapel sat a man. In the very first after-meeting, as I moved around speaking to various persons, I came to that man. I found the Holy Spirit of God had been dealing with him, but he looked at me, and said—I had been inviting people to come out into an inquiry-room:

"Can't I be saved without going in there?"

Now, when a man begins to ask that question you must deal with him just in one way. And I said:

"No; I don't think you can."

"Why," he said, "is salvation in the inquiry-room?"

"No, it is in God; but just as long as you sit here and want to dictate terms to God, you are proving that you have not got to the end of self, and there is no salvation for you. That is the trouble with you."

"Then," he said, "if I cannot be saved without going into that room, I will go to hell."

"My brother," I answered, "that is not God's choice for you. If you have chosen it for yourself, I cannot help it."

Every night that man came and sat there. Oh, how gracious God is! He does not take us at our word. He does not leave us alone when we have said some rash, foolhardy thing.

I had warned the workers, and said:

"Don't talk to that man. Leave him alone. Let God have His way with him."

I shall never forget the last night of the mission. Before I had time to ask a soul to move, that man came forward over the backs of the seats to the altar. I looked at him and said:

"I thought you were going to hell, my brother?"

He said: "Oh, I have been there all the week."

Praise God! it does a man good to get there a little while that way sometimes.

As long as you are dictating terms—"Can't I be saved right here?"—you are likely to miss the blessing. You *can* be saved there. You can be saved without a man knowing of it at the time. Somebody is bound to know of it soon, however. Nobody ever became a Christian without it flaming out sooner or later. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea both tried to be Christians in pri-

vate; but by and by there came the day of crucifixion, and these two men got the body of the dead Christ, and laid it to its last rest. You cannot be a Christian and keep it under a bushel long; the light will either go out, or set the bushel on fire. You may think you can get to Jesus Christ quietly; but as long as you are trying to dictate terms, as long as you are saying, "I don't like this noisy, babbling, rushing, muddy stream of Jordan; let me have the quiet, placid, sweet waters of Abana," just so long you are not in a condition for blessing. It is when you come to say: "Anywhere that He points the way; any means that He mentions to me; any cross He puts in front of me, I will take to get to Him, to have His cleansing"—when men come there, then they are in the way of blessing. There were many lepers in Israel, but none of them were cleansed save Naaman; and he was cleansed because he entered into the spirit of true relationship to God by obeying. And there are many who are suffering from the leprosy of sin, but they, and they only, will have cleansing who in the divinely marked way come to Him Who alone can cleanse, and abandoning all preconceived notions, and

sweeping aside every temptation to dictate terms, say:

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But"—(*best plea of all!*) "that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
Oh, Lamb of God" (*through doubt, darkness, difficulty, in spite of obstacles,*)—"I come."

God help us all so to come!

Wouldest Thou be Made Whole?

CHAPTER IV.

Wouldest Thou be Made Whole?

"Would'st thou be made whole?"
"Arise, take up thy bed, and walk."
"Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee."
—John v. 6, 8, 14.

It has been very beautifully said that all the parables of Jesus are miracles of wisdom; that all the miracles of Jesus are parables of teaching. Believing that statement to be true, I propose here to consider this miracle of healing, as a parable of teaching. In order that we may do this intelligently, suffer me to remind you again in a few words of the actual facts of the story from this fifth chapter of the Gospel of John.

Jesus had come up to Jerusalem, and passing through the Bethesda porches, He had seen lying all around, a multitude of impotent folk, sick, and maimed, and halt, such as were in need of healing and of deliverance. But the one man who attracted His attention principally, was the one in all the crowd that most sorely needed help. Christ is always

pre-eminently attracted by the most needy cases. This man had been in the grip of his infirmity for thirty-eight years. Now, that is very easily said, but how very few of us can know its actual meaning. Thirty-eight years of helplessness, not strong enough now to be able to drag himself from the place where he lay in the porches, into the pool, longing ofttimes to reach it, but always too late, some other having stepped down before him; and unable to persuade any man to help him day after day, week after week, month after month; and still, when Jesus passes through, he is impotent and needy; and in all likelihood, feebler and weaker than he had ever been.

Now, if you can for a moment, I pray you think of the surprise of the whole story. I feel that there is no more dramatic incident in the New Testament than this. The crowds are thronging Jerusalem at the feast, the sick folk are lying all about in the porches at Bethesda; and undoubtedly a great multitude of people are passing, as Jesus passed, through those porches. As the Master comes, His eye rests upon this man, who lies there in all his need, and in all his weakness, and looking

down at him, He says to him, "Wouldest thou be made whole?" And I can imagine with what astonishment the man looked up into the face of the Stranger; for I pray you remember the man did not know Him, did not know that it was the Prophet, mighty in deed and word, Who was so strangely beginning to stir the whole country; and his very first word marks his astonishment—"Sir"—as though he had said, What do you mean by asking me a question like that?—"Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." Then Jesus says, "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk," and I think I see a crowd gathering around. Human nature is just the same in every age. They begin to watch and wonder, and I think, if I had been in the crowd, I should have protested against what Jesus had said. I will tell you why presently. While the crowd gathers, the Christ quietly looks at the man, that man in the grip of an infirmity for thirty-eight years, so weak that he could not struggle his own way to the pool when the water was troubled, and he stands up, bends down again, picks up the bed upon which he had been

lying, rolling it up in all probability, flings it on his shoulder, and walks, a whole man, out of the porches into which he had been carried. And where is Jesus? He is gone. He conveyed Himself away; the crowd was coming after Him, and He departed.

Now the man starts his walk home, and some of the men who were far more eager about the observance of the Sabbath than the healing of an impotent man, stop him, and they say to him, "What right have you carrying your bed on the Sabbath?" And I like the man's answer, "The Man that healed me told me to do it." And they said, "Who is it that told you to do it?" You notice their question. They did not say, "Who is it that healed you?" They were so anxious about the Sabbath. Oh, these men that strain at gnats and swallow camels! "Who told you to carry your bed?" And he knew not that it was Jesus, and he told them he did not know, so there was an end of the strife.

Now, in all probability—if I can follow the story up, and I think I may do it correctly—he carried his bed home, and he put it down, and coming out of his house again, he made his way, eager and anxious to do what, per-

chance, he had not been able to do for long years, to mingle with the worshippers in the temple, back to the temple courts, back to the songs of Zion, back to worship. And as he is there among the worshippers, moving around, perchance greeting old friends, to their utter astonishment, suddenly he stands again face to face with the Man Who healed him. Jesus is in front of him. And Jesus looks into his face as he stands erect, and He says to him, "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee." And again the Master passes away; and so far as we know, did not speak to the man again. But in those three things that Jesus said to him, I have a radiant revelation of His perpetual method of dealing with man. First He arrested his attention, called his mind into play, and appealed to his will, "Wouldest thou be made whole?" And then He called him to act, to put into action the new consciousness and passion that had taken possession of his soul, "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk." And then, after he was healed, He conditioned all his life for him in a very simple law. He pronounced him whole, "Thou art made whole"; and then

He laid a commandment on him, "Sin no more"; and then He lit for him a solemn and suggestive lamp of warning, "lest a worse thing befall thee."

Now, shall we take these three stages in the Master's method and attempt to look at them a little more closely.

Take the first, "Wouldest thou be made whole?" The question is so simple that it seems as though we might dismiss it, and say nothing about it; and yet I am sure that that would be a great mistake, because the question that appears so simple is indeed sublime.

There are at least four facts within the compass of that question that we are bound to examine, if we would understand Christ's method with men. First, the Lord Jesus recognizes the royalty of human will. Do you want to be made whole? And I say it very reverently at once, unless he does Christ can do nothing for him. But there is more than that in the question. There is, not apparent in the question, but quite evident from what followed it, a revelation to the man of his degradation. You want to be made whole? And immediately the man's question reveals the fact that he never expected to be

made whole, that he had lost heart, that he had lost hope. He said, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me"; which, being translated into other words, means this, It is no use asking me such a question, I have not any chance of being made whole. He had lost hope, and Christ's question revealed the fact. And yet is there not in the question of Christ, because Christ asks it, a renewal of the very hope he had lost? The fact that the man answered him at all, shows that suddenly there was springing up in the man's heart the hope that was dead. Why did he answer Christ? Nay, nay, ask another question; ask the question that in all probability the man asked, as he lay there, "What made this Man say that to me? Whole! did He say? Why, there is the song of birds in the very word, and the breath of summer seems round about me once again. Whole? What does He mean? Is He going to do something for me? Is this the Man I have been waiting for, that will help me when no one else can?" And I think that while there is evidently a revelation of the degradation of the man, in

that he had lost hope, there is also a revelation of the fact that the question renewed his hope.

And yet once again, not only the recognition of royalty of will, and the revelation of degradation, and the renewal of hope, but surely a requirement, a claim upon the man suggested, in order to the end that is desired; the arrest of the man, that the man may be ready for something else. If Christ stands outside that man's will, and asks that it may consent; and if Christ, standing outside the man, reveals the man's degradation; and if, in the very question, He renews his hope; is there not a hint, an inference, a suggestion, that if he is going to have any wholeness that Christ can give him he must be ready to do what Christ tells him? So that, it seems to me, we have at least four things revealed in this question. When Christ comes to deal with a man that is impotent, a man that is in the grip of some mastering disease that is sapping his life and spoiling his days, first He recognizes the royalty of human will; secondly, reveals the fact of degradation, that hope is lost; thirdly, renews hope by the very fact of His coming, and His question; and

lastly, requires submission to whatever He shall say, if the benefit that He is ready and willing to confer is to be obtained.

Now, for the moment, let us pass from the story, and attempt to apply this revelation of its meaning to ourselves. If this study has any value in it, it has that value as we are conscious of our sin, conscious of our shortcomings, conscious that we are not what we would be, conscious of the passions that master us, of the evil things that hold us in their grip. If Christ is indeed to heal spiritually; if men are to lose the chains that bind them; if indeed "the pulses of desire" are to feel the touch of "His coolness and balm"; if the poison that has burned in our veins like a veritable fever is to be quenched; there are certain things that we have to look solemnly in the face: things that are suggested by this very first question.

Jesus confronts you, my brother, my sister, personally, individually, in loneliness; and the question He is now asking you is this: Do you want to be made whole?

Now, let me say at once to you, if you do not, then I have no message for you further. I think we may just as well take these things

step by step, and be quite serious about them, and businesslike about them. If there is a man who has no desire to be made whole, no desire after pureness, no desire after wholeness, no desire after a higher mode of life, no desire after the things that are beautiful, the things that are of good report, then I have no further message for that man. You drop out of my argument, you drop out of my message; I have nothing more to say to you. I have no warrant to deliver any evangel of power and of blessing to the man that does not want to be made whole.

But now, hear me. Is there such a man? There may be, but I very much doubt it. I wonder if that statement sounds at all astonishing. I will repeat it, as revealing a growing conviction in my heart and life, as I work for God, that you will have a very great difficulty in finding me the man that does not want to be made whole. Oh, but you say, look at the men who are sinning, and sinning with a high hand and outstretched arm. Look at the men that have all kinds of chances of amendment. Look at the men who have heard the Gospel message from childhood up, and yet are sinning on. Do you mean to tell

us, some one is saying, that you think those men really want to be made whole? In a vast majority of cases I believe they do.

I remember one early morning as far back as the year 1887. I had been out all through the night, sitting by the bedside of a dying man in the town of Hull in the north of England, and as I was taking my way home, having seen him pass away, about four o'clock in the morning, turning suddenly around a corner, I came face to face with a young fellow, the son of godly people, a child of tender care, and constant prayer, and yet who, having fallen, was just going all the pace in wickedness; and meeting him suddenly like that, just turning the corner so that there was no escape, he and I stood face to face. He was hurrying home, through the gray morning, after a night of carousal. I took his hand in mine, and I looked into his face, and I said,

"Charley, when are you going to stop this kind of thing?"

I wish I could tell what that man said, and how he said it. I shall never forget it, I think, to my dying day. He looked into my face, a young man just about my own age at the time,

and yet prematurely aged, with sunken cheek and blood-shot eye, and that grey ashen hue that tells of debauchery; and holding out a hand that he could not hold still, that trembled as he held it, he said, "What do you mean by asking me when I am going to stop?" He said, "I would lose that hand here and now, if I knew how to stop." I do not think that was a lonely case. I believe that if you could only get hold of half these men that are going wrong, if you could only get hold of them, and press them up into some corner in the early morning, catching them unawares, when they are not prepared to debate the thing with you or laugh at your entreaty, they would speak out a great truth, and it would be, We want to be pure, we hate impurity.

Oh, I know you will suggest a hundred whys. Oh, yes, I know all the whys, but face the fact first. I very much doubt if you can find me a young fellow who is playing the fool with himself, and sinning, sinning, sinning, but that if you could get back of the exterior, if you could only know what is going on in his own heart, you would find a man who wants to be made whole. Profoundly do I believe it.

Now, Christ asks first, that if that is true, if I am right about you, that you will say so to Him now. That is His first question.

But now, take the next step. This man did want to be made whole. The question seems to be superfluous in one sense. I can imagine that the man might have said to Jesus, What makes you ask me that? Do you suppose I love lying here? Do you suppose I am fond of this infirmity? Do you suppose that I really am delighted with this spoilation of my life? The man did not say all that. What then did he say? He said the next thing. He said in effect, Sir, it is no use to ask me, I cannot be made whole. I tried, but I never got down to the troubled water. I have been waiting for a man to help me; that man has never come. It is no good, do not ask me about being whole. Of course I want to be whole, but I never shall.

Now here we are touching the reason why so many of these men are continuing in sin. They have lost heart, they have lost hope, they do not believe they can mend. When, every now and then, one of them comes to talk to me, or some Christian worker, and the whole truth is talked out, in straightness, that

is the story we have to hear again and again. A man says to us. Oh, I would give anything if I could go right, but I cannot; it is no good. I have tried and tried and tried, and failed and failed and failed. I have been to meetings, and I have been to ministers, and I have been to all sorts of people, and I have never yet been able to stand up and be strong, since I became the slave of sin. A man comes to me and says, I am in the grip of a passion for drink. Oh, the number of such men that one has to deal with. And he says, I want to go right, God knows I want to go right, but I cannot. Said a man to me some years ago, who was a member of my congregation, a man of splendid parts a man who, every now and then, just broke out and simply went mad with drink; and I went to see him as he was getting back out of one of these terrible drinking bouts, and sitting in his house with him, he looked at me with a sort of disdain in his face, the disdain which is the mark, not of unkindness, but of inward agony; and he said, "Mr. Morgan, what is the good of your talking to me? You don't know anything about this passion for drink, you don't know what it means." Said he,

"When the thirst is on me, if you put a glass of wine on that table, and standing on the other side of it, you told me that if I touched it you would shoot me, and I knew that hell lay the other side of the bullet, I would drink that wine."

Now, don't you people that know nothing about it think that that is fanaticism. There is many a man in that condition. The grip of sin in the form of a passion for drink is awful. When it gets hold of a man it becomes more than a spiritual sin, it becomes more than a mental aberration, it becomes a physical disease. Many a man is in that condition, and he will tell you he has tried and tried, and failed and failed. Doesn't that man want to be right? Of course he does. What, then, is the matter with him? He has lost hope; he has lost heart. He is saying exactly what this man said, There is nobody can help me; don't talk to me about being whole.

But what next? And oh, my brother, I am talking to you. God knows just what you are doing, nursing your agony, hiding your sin, hidden in the world from everybody except the Master. Now, may I not say to

you this, that just as the question of Jesus suggested to this man another possibility, very faint, very unlikely, and yet, perchance, something in it; and just as the question of Jesus brought to this man a new hope—may I not say to you now that the question of Christ ought to, and I believe is, bringing a new hope into your life? You know I want to take you just where you are, my brother, and help you. I want to take you right down there in the midst of your weakness, I want to take you with that underlying passion for wholeness, and that overlying conception that you can't have it, and I want to say to you, isn't the very fact that you are willing to listen, and that God's message is being delivered to you, and that once again the question of the Christ is coming to you personally, Do you want to be made whole?—is not there something in it at least that ought to suggest to you that there is half a chance, if no more, that Christ may be able to do something for you? Oh, I will take you on your half chance, if you will only come, because my Master did. I like to see the men that came to Him, not quite sure that they would get anything, and they always got what they wanted. There was a

man one day came to Him, and said to Him, If Thou canst do anything for my boy. It was a poor faith, it was a faith that came on a crutch—"If Thou canst." And did Jesus say to him, Well, if that is all your confidence, you had better go away; if you question My power, I have nothing for you? No, no, Christ never does that kind of thing. If a man cannot come without his "if" Christ will bless him, notwithstanding his "if," if he will come. Christ flung the "if" back at him, and He said, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible," and he got his blessing.

And there was another man came to Christ, a good deal meaner than that one. This man that came to Christ did not say, "If Thou canst." We have little respect for that man. But the other man said, "If Thou wilt." He did not question the power so much as the willingness. And was Jesus offended, and did He send him away because he came with an "if"? No, oh no. He gave him His blessing. He said, Do you doubt My willingness? Listen. "I will; be thou clean," and the man was clean. So that if you are coming upon a crutch to-night, come. If you are coming to-night, saying as

you come, I don't think there is much in this, we have heard this kind of thing before; if you are saying, as many a man has said to me, Oh, I have been out in the after-meeting before, never mind, come on the half chance. Take your half chance. That is what Christ has come to do now, just to give you a gleam of light. Oh, a great deal more than that; but that is the first thing, and if you want to be made whole, I tell you, man, the fact that you are seeking light is a sign, or ought to be a sign to you, that there may be a chance even for you.

Now, follow to the last of these points, the loyalty of will, the revelation of degradation, the renewal of hope, and the requirement of submission. Let me talk now as out of the experience of the man himself who lies in the porch. He asks me if I want to be made whole? Of course I do. He asks me if I want to be made whole? What is the use, I can't. He asks me if I want to be made whole? He must mean something; surely He means something. I am inclined to think He means something. If so, I shall have to do whatever He says. Ah, that is it. That is the last thing.

Wouldest Thou be Made Whole?

The question must come to that point. It is a wonderful question, one of Christ's questions, recognising the man's royalty of will, standing outside him until he wants Him, and then flashing upon him his own degradation, and making him say there was no chance, and yet kindling in his heart the new passion for wholeness; and then suggesting, so that the man cannot escape the suggestion, that if this Stranger was going to do anything for him, then he must be willing to do what the Stranger should tell him to do. So far it is all mental.

What is the next thing? Now Christ passes from the realm of the mind into the realm of action, and He says to him three things altogether, "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk." I do not want to insult your intelligence, and yet I want you to remember He does not say, "Walk, take up thy bed, and Arise." Get right hold of that. That is what some of you are trying to do. You are trying to walk before you are up. You can't do it! He began with the first thing, and then the second thing, and then the third thing. "Arise, take up thy bed"—some of you would have left out the middle of it; some

of you would have said, Arise and walk; oh no, the value of it you will see presently—"Arise, take up thy bed, and walk."

Now, what is the first thing a man has to do if he is going to be made whole? First, "Arise." But what is this? What is the rising that this man is called to do? I pray you notice very carefully what this is. It is the one thing that he can't do, that Christ tells him to do first. That is what made me say at the beginning of the sermon that if I had been in that crowd, I think I would have protested.

Let us go back, and imagine we are there. The porches, the sick folk, this worst case of all. A Stranger coming through, suddenly stops and says, Do you want to be made whole? and the man says, It is no use, I can't get into the water, there is nobody to put me in. And then the Stranger says "Arise!" Why, my dear sir, I should feel inclined to say to Him, This is absurd; this is the one thing the man can't do. What do you suppose he is lying here for all these years, if he could get up? Of course he can't arise. I am prepared to say to this Stranger, first, it is impossible; and therefore it is unreason-

able; and I am not going to change these decisions. Impossible, and unreasonable, and I utter my protest.

Why, what is this! The man is up! The man is up while I am arguing! Was I wrong to say it was impossible? Certainly not. Was I wrong to say it was unreasonable? Certainly not. But he is up. I know it, but he has done the impossible and the unreasonable thing.

That is the miracle of Christianity. That is the revelation of Christ's perpetual method with a man He is going to heal. Are you in the grip of some evil passion, of some evil habit? For I call you to notice that sin in every man focuses itself at some one point pre-eminently, and you know that you would have been in the Kingdom of God years ago, but for one thing. You know what the one thing is, and when Christ begins to deal with you, He brings you face to face with your impossibility, and He says, "Now, begin there!"

To the young man who was a ruler, and wealthy, Jesus said, "One thing thou lackest." What was the one thing he lacked? Some men would have said it was poverty. But these are the men who do not read their

Bible carefully. What was it he lacked? Control! "Follow Me." But what was the hindrance between his life of self-control and his life of being controlled by another? What lay between? His wealth. Now, Christ said, Sell that, give that up, put that away. There was nothing more impossible in all that man's life than that he should part with his wealth, and He brought him face to face with his impossibility.

There was a man in the synagogue one day whom Jesus called out, and he came and stood in front. What is the matter with that man? A withered hand! What will Christ tell him to do, to hold his other hand up? No, certainly not. What then? To hold out the withered hand! the one he can't hold out. He always brings the man face to face with the impossible thing. Always this, always this—the impossible thing!

My dear sir, Christ is not going to ask *you* to give up the drink. Certainly not. Why not? Because it is not your impossible thing. He is not going to ask you, my dear sir, to sign a pledge against swearing. Why not? Because you never do it. That is the human method. The human method is to get one,

or two, or three little pledges, and try to make them fit everybody. And oh, how eager men are to give up their brothers' idols!

Oh, the difficulty of it, and yet the magnificence of it! Christ is dealing with every man alone just now, and you know what He is saying to you at your weakest point: Begin and do the right thing. Arise!

But now I say, while I am arguing, the man has done it, and you may do it. Shall we try and find out how this man did it? This is the great secret. There is no problem of such interest as to know how that man got up when he could not get up. I will tell you exactly how it happened, and I will tell you because I know, experimentally and personally, how it happened.

Let us look at it. Christ first addressed his will—Wilt thou? That is the first thing. When Christ says "Arise!" it means that His will is that the man should be made whole. Now, mark another thing. There is power enough in Christ to make him whole. Christ is quite equal to supply him with all he needs. There is, however, only one way in which there can be connection made between the power of Christ and the impotence of the

man. The man cannot; Christ can. How are you going to get together the man's cannot and Christ's can? That is what we want to find out. When Christ said "Arise," the man said to himself, I want to be made whole, but it's no good, yet I wonder what this Man means. I will do what He says. I cannot, but I will, because He says so.

Now mark, Christ's will and the man's will touch, and in that connection, the connection of will with will, the power of the Christ flashes into the man, and he stands erect, not in the energy of will, but in the energy of Christ, which has become his, because he has submitted his will to the will of the Christ.

That is the way you are going to master that evil thing in your life, my brother, or you will never master it. It is the Christ power that you need to set you on your feet and make you live. And you can only come into connection with the Christ power when you will to do what He tells you to do. Oh, but you say, I cannot. As long as you say that, you will not. But supposing you try another way. Say no longer "I will," you have said that scores of times, and been beaten.

Do not say "I cannot," for as long as you say that you never will. What, then, shall you say? Say this, "I cannot, but because He said so I will!" You see in that there is an abandonment to Him, you are handing your life over to Him, you do it in obedience to Him; and whenever a man takes that stand, all the power he needs for the breaking of the chains that bind him are at his disposal, and he will stand up erect, able to do the impossible, doing by faith the unreasonable, because his abandonment of will and his act of faith have brought him into living contact with the Christ of God.

And now the man is up, what next? "Take up thy bed, and walk." Take up thy bed! I think one of the most illuminative and most beautiful things I have ever seen about that, is from the pen of Dr. Marcus Dods, just in a sentence and a flash. Dr. Dods says, "Why was the man to take up his bed? In order that there should be no provision made for a relapse." Ah. that is the point. Did you hear that? I don't want you to miss that. No provision for a relapse. That is the principle upon which a man is to start his Christian life.

The temptation to this man was to say, Well, I am up; I am up, really I am; yes, really I am up, and He has done it; but I think I'd better leave that bed; I don't know how I will get on in the street; I don't know how I will get on to-morrow; I'd better leave it, in case I have to come back. As sure as he had done it, he would have come back. Oh, no, no, that won't do! Jesus says, Take it up, carry the thing that has been carrying you, master the thing that has mastered you; take it up! take it up!

May I put the principle in other words, and declare it thus, When you start to follow Christ, burn your bridges behind you! Don't give yourself a chance to go back. I do not think too much emphasis can be laid upon that. Oh, the men that leave the bridge, and presently slip back over it! Here is a man who has been, to revert to my previous illustration, the slave of drink; he says, "Now, I am going to quit this in the strength of Christ," and my profound conviction is that is the only way a man can quit. "I am going to do it." He means it, and he gets up and starts; when he gets home, in some cupboard in his house is a half bottle of whiskey.

What is he going to do with it? Oh, he says, I will drive the cork right in, and I will put a seal on it, and I won't touch it, and I will keep it in case I am in need of it. I tell you, that man will want whiskey within twenty-four hours. No, no! If that has been your besetment, when you get home, smash it, pour it out! I am not going to say soft, easy things. I am not going to tell you all you have to do is to believe. I want to tell you that you are to believe with the belief that manifests itself in works, and unless you have a belief like that, it is worth nothing. Burn your bridges, cut off your companionships, and say farewell to the men that have been luring you to ruin. Be a man, stand up, and say to the man that tempted you, and drew you aside, your dearest friend, "I have done, I have done; I am going the other way." And I want to say this to you, the chances are all in favour of the fact that the man will come with you. That is the remarkable thing about it, that the very man that is luring you to wrong will very likely come with you, if you are only man enough to burn your bridges. Take up your bed and walk.

"And walk!" I would like to tell you all

there is in that. I will tell you one thing that is in it. Don't expect to be carried! I want to tell you that the churches are altogether too full of perambulator Christians—men and women who have to be nursed and coddled by the ministers to keep them there at all; men and women who say, "If you don't call, then I am going." Oh, go! Give us a chance!

Now, if you are going to start to follow Christ, young man, young woman, my brother, my sister, WALK. And remember, that when He gives you power to stand up, He gives you power to carry your bed, after you walk—a great sufficiency of power.

Then Jesus met this man once again. What did He say to him then? "Thou art made whole!" Has He ever said that to you? No, some one says, I don't think He has. Then you are not a Christian. Don't be satisfied because some one else said you are made whole. Never rest until He has said it to your inmost soul, and you know it. But when He does say it, then what? "Sin no more." Now have done with your argument as to whether you are compelled to sin or not. He says "no." How dare you, child of His love, child of His blood, child of

His power—how dare you go on sinning, and say you can't help it, when He looks you in the face, and says, "Sin no more!" He never says that to a man until He has made him whole. He does not begin by saying that. He does not go to the man that is impotent, to the man that is weak, He does not say to-night to the man that is outside the Kingdom, "Sin no more." He first heals him, He first gives him power, and then He tells him to "sin no more."

What else does He say? He says this, "lest a worse thing befall thee." What could be worse? To go back to your impotence, to go back to the old disease, and have no one come and heal you. That could be worse.

I leave you to follow the lines of that indefinite and solemn warning that Christ uttered to the man, but I pray you remember it. If you have been healed, if you have been made whole, if you have been born again, and you are playing with sin, and sinning on, excusing it as an infirmity, remember Christ's word comes to-night, swift, scorching, scathing—"Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee."

Where is my last word to be uttered? Back in the middle of the story. "Arise," says the Master, make a beginning, make a start, and make your start, not by making up your mind that you are going to do great things, but by making up your mind that Christ is going to do great things, and you are going to let Him. That is the very heart of the message! That is the secret of power!

Clay in the Potter's Hand.

CHAPTER V.

Clay in the Potter's Hand.

"As the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah xviii. 6.)

This is, in the first instance, a national statement, but since the greater includes the less, we may argue that the principles which regulate national life must also influence individual life. The only social and national upbuilding possible must result from the upbuilding of the individual life and character. From this great national statement, made to God's chosen people, we shall take the principle and consider it in its individual application.

Let us first examine the principle itself; second, our relationship to that principle; and third, the deep underlying truth, which makes this principle one in which we may rejoice.

Look first, then, at this principle. "As clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel."

Can anything convey the truth of God's

sovereignty more forcibly and simply than these words? If you have ever seen the clay on the potter's wheel, being moulded and fashioned by the thought and will and activity of the potter himself, as the wheel revolved, you must have been impressed with the thought of surrender; for without desire expressed or suggestion made the clay was yielded to the hands of the potter. It was plastic to his will and touch. God says, "As clay is in the hand of the potter, so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel."

God has designed and created and sustained me, and I have absolutely no appeal against His will. God has supreme right to do whatsoever He will with the earth, and the nations, and with each particular individual in the nations. If God chooses to mark a line, and say, "There thy service ends," have I any right to complain? If God were to take me right out of my present circumstances or out of this world to-day, no matter what use I have made of my opportunities here, have I any right to complain or appeal against it? None. Whatever God chooses to do, He has the right to do. God has never ceded His sovereign right to the

Devil or to any one else. Though He still permits evil to exist in the world, He holds the reins, and the Devil could not touch a single hair upon the back of a single camel that belonged to Job until God gave him permission. God reigneth! He is neither dead nor deposed.

The tendency of this day is to a loose doctrine of divine government, which is producing impious blasphemy in the way that men look into the face of God, and tell Him what He ought and ought not to do. Blessed be His name that His ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts, or how many a man would be smitten and stricken to the very death! How long-suffering God is! Clay in the hand of the Potter: that is our position, and He can make or break, mould or fashion us, as He will, so far as our right of resistance or questioning or complaint is concerned.

What is my relation to this great principle of divine government? There is this difference between the clay and myself: I have intelligence, I have will, but my will is to omnipotence as the materialism of the clay is to my will. The clay is infinitely below the

potter, and must submit to his pleasure. In the hands of God I am yet more powerless than the clay in the hands of the potter.

What, then, is my relation to this principle? My proper attitude is to *acknowledge my weakness*, and to say that I have no power to alter my own shape or substance. What I am I am, and out of that I can never evolve anything better. That which is flesh is flesh. That is my state by nature, and the part of wisdom is to acknowledge it, and take that place before God.

The next step is to use that will about which we talk so much, and to act on the truth which Tennyson saw when he said:

> "Our wills are ours, we know not how;
> Our wills are ours, to make them Thine."

We show our wisdom when our weakness is acknowledged by *yielding ourselves to God* and lying plastic in His hand that He may work His will in our lives. There is to be perfect acquiescence in the will of God.

That is better than resignation, but there is something even beyond acquiescence, it is *delight* in the will of God. There must be no desire as to the shape I am to take, or as to the manner of my preparation. We must

be willing to let God work out His purpose in our lives; by sickness, if He so wills it, by suffering, by sorrow, by bereavement, by breaking us in order to make us. If I set my will up against that, then I am thwarting the Potter, and I am hindering His purpose. In brief, I must *abandon* myself to God. I must abandon myself to Him without questioning as to whether it is to be there or here, this way or that way, under these circumstances or those; the one question for me to ask must be, "What is Thy will?" God is King, and I am to say Amen to all His will.

Now look at the purpose of God underlying all His dealings with us. Let everything else be put out of the vision. When we get to this point, though it be through heartbreak and disappointment, everything else vanishes from sight, and only the thought that God is doing a great work stands before us. We never saw this when God was dealing with us. At first we simply stood in the presence of God and yielded ourselves to His will.

Underlying this is a deeper truth. It is contained in that old text, which no preacher has ever exhausted, which every child loves;

a truth contained in three short words; a truth which every child seems to feel, and which every aged saint confesses to have hardly touched the fringe of; a truth which holds all revelations and blessedness in it—GOD IS LOVE.

What has that to do with it?

Everything. I am clay in the hands of God, and I tremble; I am clay in the hands of Love, and I trust. God is love. My creation is the creation of love. His purpose in creating me was love. His government is the government of love. He alone understands me and knows all my possibilities. I might live among you for years, and you would not know me. There are depths in every nature that no man knows. No man hath seen God at any time; it is equally true that no man hath seen man at any time. We do not even know ourselves, but God knows us through and through; He understands our thoughts afar off, and there is no hiding ourselves from the searching of His eye. God is love, and consequently when He surrounds me with law, it is love that fences me round.

It is not a hard, capricious taskmaster that

says, "Now I have a being in my hands, I will enjoy having my way on him."

That is human. No, it is devilish! God says:

"This is the child of My heart, this is the highest work of My creation, made in My image, and I will hedge him about with law and commandments, because I love him and know all the depths of his nature. If I lead him through tears and suffering and sorrow, they shall be but the sweet ministers of My tender love and infinite compassion for him."

Love is on the throne. How can I learn that? By submitting to the kingship.

Many people have said to me:

"We don't love God. We reverence Him and adore Him, but we do not really love Him. What shall we do?"

My answer is, "We love, because He first loved us."

How do we find this out? Only as we face this first fact of His kingship and begin to obey Him. By obeying the law a man discovers the love in the law.

Let me earnestly warn you against dividing God into halves and saying: "This is law and that is love." His law and His love are

identical. A man should never talk about the providence of God as though it were a sort of afterthought by which He helps a man to bear the severity of law. God's providence is God's government, and no man ever passes into the realm of love until he recognises God's kingship, and submits at the foot of the cross to that kingship.

Take that exquisite teaching of our Lord when He says: "Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." He has been speaking to His disciples about food, and clothing, and the necessities of this life, and then He says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." If I could see God as my Father, I could love Him. How, then, am I to come to see Him as my Father? What does Jesus say? "Seek ye first the *kingdom* of God."

You will find the fatherhood in the kingship of God, the love of God in the law of God; you will discover the exquisite tenderness of the divine compassion when you submit to the sovereignty of God, and yield yourself to His absolute control. How have

I come to realise my mother's love to me and my father's love more than I ever could in my childhood? It has been by coming to understand that the very restrictions which they placed upon me of old were the restrictions of an intense love for me. I used to think they loved me when they let me have my own way, but I have discovered they loved me most when they did not let me have my own way. So men get an insight into the deep love of God by obeying the law of God, which at first seems irksome, and by submitting to this great supreme truth of the sovereignty of God.

On and on God is leading you, putting His hand on this and that, hedging you in here, and holding you up there; and it is always love that does it. There is always a more marvellous unfolding of His love in these acts of God, and you will only discover the love of God as your own heart responds, and as you submit yourself to His kingship.

Most reverently do I take the supreme illustration of the love of God from the life of my blessed Lord. It was He Who said, "I delight to do Thy will." And why? Because in His perfect, unquestioning obedience

to the will of God He knew what the love of God was.

All the divine blessings which we are seeking are conditioned upon this, that we do recognise God's kingship, and submit to it really, absolutely, with thorough abandonment of all questioning. Some people tell us that we should always count the cost. We ought, in everything except this. Here there should be no counting the cost; and by refusing to count the cost we count the cost in the best way; by refusing to attempt to reckon up God and ourselves by the puny laws of human mathematics we reach the divine mathematics which take good care of us all the way, and see to it that we abide in Him forever. To rebel against this law is to take my life for a little while out of the hand of the Potter, and by so doing to render it purposeless and shapeless, so that it is to become loss and ruin. To rebel is useless. God's law and righteousness are vindicated in human failure as well as in human success, and the man who makes shipwreck is the man who, knowing the will of God, disobeys, and goes out into the darkling void where God is not. That man in his eternal loss vindicates the

kingship of Jehovah. But, my brother, what God wants is your submission, because He loves to take you, perhaps to break you, but for your good, for I read that the potter broke the vessel on the wheel, "and he did *make it again*." The secret of all blessing is:

"I worship thee, sweet will of God,
And all thy ways adore;
And every day I live, I learn
To love thee more and more."

The Divine Government of Human Lives.

CHAPTER VI.

The Divine Government of Human Lives.

"Jehovah our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain." (Deut. i. 6.)

The sojourn of Israel, the ancient people of God, at Horeb had been important and interesting. There they had received from God the words of the law, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the ritual of worship. They had there had revelations of the glory of God, and revelations of their own hearts; they had found in themselves rebellion and sin, even in that brief time. They had also had revelations of the tenderness and compassion of their God.

At last the organisation is complete; they are ready to move forward and to take possession of the land which God has given them, and the word comes to them suddenly, with a pertinence that reminds them that in actual practice they are a theocracy under the direct government of God. Every man of them

holds to the theory of the divine government; but now a sudden order takes hold of the creed which they had professed, and turns it into a fact to be put into practice. To these people sojourning at the mount, in the place of revelation, in the place of wonderful blessing, the word comes swift and sudden and startling:

"Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain." (Deut. i. 6.)

This was indeed a startling and urgent word, revealing certain great truths concerning this government of God, which it is of the utmost importance that we should perpetually bear in mind.

It reveals to me, first of all, that *the divine government is a fact*. It also reveals certain truths concerning that divine government, namely:

1. That the divine government is a disturbing element in human life.

2. That the divine government is a progressive element in human life.

3. That the divine government is a methodical element in human life.

If it be a fact that God governs my life and your life, then He will disturb us; He

will disturb us in order that we may make progress; and He will disturb us that we may make progress along certain definitely marked lines.

First of all, then, these words reveal the fact of the divine government. How easy it would have been for Israel to settle down there and say, "We believe in God and in the divine government." Had there been no voice speaking to them in actual leading, no word coming to disturb them, they might have come to hold the divine government merely as a theory. Then it would have passed out of their lives, and would have failed to be what it was intended to be to them.

Beloved, let me remind you that the divine government is a very definite fact. God is absolute monarch wherever He is King at all. His government is autocratic. He does not consult us as to what He shall do with us, where He shall send us, what He would have us to do. Moreover, His government is an imperative government. He never permits us to make compromises with Him for a single moment. He speaks the word of authority. He marks the path without ever consulting us, and having done so, our only relationship

to that government is that of implicit, unquestioning, immediate obedience.

Now, consider what this government means. Imagine the stir that must have been created in that camp when the word came, "Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain." Imagine how tents would be struck, and camels loaded throughout the whole of the camp. The people, who had been living there for a little more than a year, were suddenly rooted up and ordered to move away. Think how at the sudden proclamation of that word of God all social and family arrangements had to be set aside. That word touched every tent and touched every soul, and wherever families had arranged to meet together at a certain time for social intercourse, the whole plan was swept away. The divine voice had spoken, "Ye have tarried long enough," and no engagement is of sufficient importance to hinder the divine word. Tents must be struck immediately. All the minor arrangements of every-day life, important in their place, must be set on one side, because the word of the King is supreme, and is sufficient in itself to set aside every arrangement that these people have made.

What a disturbing business! What a serious thing to be under the authority of some one who can upset everything in our lives without consulting us, and by a word can mark for us the moment of departure! That is the government of God. We may talk and sing about the kingdom, and pray about the kingdom, but until we face that fact we know nothing of what it is to be living in the kingdom of God and under the government of the Most High.

Human arrangements are constantly disturbed in the kingdom of God, and what is more remarkable still, divine plans seem to be changed, and orders that we have most definitely received from on high are countermanded, and the whole program of life again and again is changed for the men and women who are in the kingdom of God, and are desirous of obeying only His will. To-day a man is in a sphere where God has put him, and on every hand God is graciously setting His seal upon the work that He has given him to do. But the divine voice comes: "Ye have tarried here long enough." That work must be dropped. All its hallowed associations must be left behind, and all the tender

ties that have become entwined around the heart on account of that work must be snapped. The divine voice is heard—the only voice to which a man in the kingdom of God should pay any attention—and the sphere of work entered into because the divine finger pointed that way must be left the moment that voice bids the man move forward.

God comes into our lives in strange, mysterious ways when we are under His government. He may pluck away a loved one, and leave us with broken hearts, and almost desolate homes for a time. Earthly friendships are often severed by divine government. Two souls knit together in the sacred bond of friendship, seemingly created for mutual service in the kingdom of God, are taken by the divine government and separated by thousands of miles. Divine government is a disturbing element, breaking cherished plans, and associations, and hopes. The aspiration of our heart, centered upon a friend, a child, an event, is suddenly crushed, and in a moment we find ourselves stranded in darkness! All this comes to men and women in the line of the divine government. It is a disturbing element in every human life. God has

made His heroes and heroines by such dealings.

In the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses thirty-five and thirty-six, we have very clearly indicated the attitude of a Christian.

"Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord, when He shall return from the marriage feast; that, when He cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto Him."

Here is the character of the Christian. The loins girded like a pilgrim; no settling down amid the things of the earth, but a continual waiting for the divine voice; ready to be disturbed when God would disturb; willing ever to respond to the expression of the divine will, and satisfied in obedience. Of course the ultimate issue of this is the waiting for the Master Himself to come, but if I am living with my loins girded, waiting for the last summons that calls me to fellowship in the ages beyond, then am I ready for every call that precedes, whether it be to suffering or to service.

The same thing is taught by Paul in his

letter to the Romans, the thirteenth chapter, the eleventh and twelfth verses: "And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."

The figure is that of a military camp. Soldiers have been sleeping in their tents, and suddenly the cry goes out that the day is breaking. Men rise, fling off the garments of the night, and gird on the armour, ready for the coming of the king and for the word of command. The awakening here referred to is at the end of the dispensation, but it has its application to the whole of life. Men and women who are under the government of God are always homeless men and women, sojourners in tents, never dwelling in houses. That is the character of the people whom God governs.

But you ask, "Would you break down home life?"

Of course I would not; but my home is to be my lodging-place, and if God orders me to strike my tent and move away, immediately

the tent is to be struck and I am to move. See how Abraham, the father of the faithful, lived. "A tent and an altar, a tent and an altar." He pitched his tent and erected his altar. His altar was the mark of the fact that he lived in relationship to the divine. The tent marked the fact that he was only a sojourner, a stranger, and a pilgrim upon the road.

The divine government is a disturbing element. My duty is so to live that I shall be ready to be disturbed at any moment when God pleases.

Now turn to the second point, because that explains the first. The divine government is not only a disturbing element in human life, it is *a progressive element*.

God disturbs a man. Why? To move him on to something better—never that there may be retrogression, never merely for the sake of disturbance. If God asks me to strike my tent to-day and move out yonder, it is because yonder there is a higher possibility, a more glorious outlook, a more perfect sphere. I may not see the advantage at first, but God's eye is always on the consummation, and He moves His people step by step at the

right moment in the right way, and ever, ever onward, towards that glorious consummation.

Progress is not necessarily pleasant. Notice how, years after, Moses speaks of the departure from Horeb. In the nineteenth verse of the first chapter of Deuteronomy, he says:

"And we journeyed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which ye saw, by the way to the hill-country of the Amorites, as Jehovah our God commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea."

That was the movement. But how? Through that great and terrible wilderness. It was not a pleasant experience, but it was progress; it was moving onward. It was a further march into the purposes of God.

Now, beloved, if the divine government is a disturbing element, to be undisturbed is to be God-forsaken. If we know nothing of the voice calling us to alter plans, and set aside arrangements, and simply step out upon the divine word in faith as Abraham did, then we are God-forsaken men and women. Beyond that, to be God-forsaken is to settle to failure.

"Oh," you say, "let me stay here; my home is so comfortable, I am so happy."

God says: "Move from this place and go yonder."

You say: "I cannot. Let me remain where I am."

What are you asking? You are asking for your own breakdown and failure. God's plan for you is progress, growth; and you are asking for arrested development and for failure.

"Oh, no," you say, "I am only asking not to be disturbed."

It is the same thing. When you and I pray, in our foolishness, that God will not disturb us, we ask Him to give us no more progress, but to let us settle where we are and pass down to failure.

There is no more exquisite figure, I think, in the whole Book of God of the disturbing element of divine government and its issue than that in the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy. It is a beautiful picture. Read from the ninth verse, "For Jehovah's portion is His people." This is exactly what Paul says to the Ephesians about God's inheritance in the saints. Very well, then, if the Lord's portion is His people, He will value His people; and what will He do to them?

"Jacob is the lot of His inheritance. He

found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He compassed him about, He cared for him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle that stirreth up her nest, that fluttereth over her young, He spread abroad His wings, He took them, He bare them on His pinions. Jehovah alone did lead him, and there was no foreign god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he did eat the increase of the field; and He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; butter of the herd and milk of the flock, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the finest of the wheat; and of the blood of the grape thou drankest wine."

That whole passage is full of exquisite beauty, but here is what I want you to notice. Jehovah's portion is His people; where did He find them? "In the waste howling wilderness, and He compassed them about." Then comes the verse that reveals both the disturbing and the progressive elements in divine government: "As an eagle that stirreth up her nest, that fluttereth over her young, He spread abroad His wings, He took them, He bare them on His pinions."

That picture is full of poetry, full of life and truth and beauty. Mark it. Have you ever seen an eagle stir up her nest? You know what happens. There in the nest, right upon the rocky height, are the eaglets; the mother eagle comes, and taking hold of them, flings them out of their nest. They were so comfortable there, but she flings them right out of the nest high above the earth. They begin to fall straightway. They have never been in air before; they have always been in the nest.

Is not that mother bird cruel? Why does she disturb the eaglets?

Watch her and you will understand. As long as you look upon the struggling eaglets in the air you miss the point. Watch the eagle. Having stirred up her nest, "she spreadeth abroad her pinions," the pinions that beat the air behind her as she rises superior to it. Where are the eaglets? Struggling, falling. She is superior; they are falling. Then what does she do? "She beareth them on her pinions." She swoops beneath them, catches them on her wings, and bears them up. What is she doing? Teaching them to fly. She drops them

again, and again they struggle in the air, but this time not so helplessly. They are finding out what she means. She spreads her pinions to show them how to fly, and as they fall again, she catches them again.

That is how God deals with you and with me. Has He been stirring up your nest? Has He flung you out until you felt lost in an element that was new and strange? Look at Him. He is not lost in that element. He spreads out the wings of His omnipotence to teach us how to soar. What then? He comes beneath us and catches us on His wings. We thought when He flung us out of the nest it was unkind. No; He was teaching us to fly that we might enter into the spirit of the promise, "They shall mount up with wings, as eagles." He would teach us how to use the gifts which He has bestowed on us, and which we cannot use as long as we are in the nest.

Imagine the issue of keeping eaglets in the nest! It would be contrary to their nature, contrary to the purposes for which they are framed and fitted. There is a purpose in the eagle. What is it? Flight sunward. There is a purpose in your life, newborn child of

God. What is it? Flight sunward, heavenward, Godward. If you stop in the nest you will never get there. God comes into your life and disturbs you, breaks up your plans, and extinguishes your hopes, the lights that have lured you on. He spoils everything; what for? That He may get you on His wings and teach you the secret forces of your own life, and lead you to higher development and higher purposes. This government of God is a disturbing element, but, praise His name! it is a progressive element.

Now take the third point. Not only is the divine government disturbing and progressive, but it is methodical. Strike your tents, get away from this mountain. Where to? The land! That is the ultimate issue—possession of the land.

Now notice, beloved, that not only is there an ultimate issue in the mind of God when He disturbs His people, but there is clearly marked direction. We see this in the seventh verse of this chapter:

"Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the hill-country of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the Arabah, in the hill-country, and in the lowland, and in

the South, and by the seashore, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates."

There is direction towards possession.

But the most exquisite statement of all that marks the divine arrangement for the journey is in the thirty-second and the thirty-third verses: " . . . . Jehovah your God, Who went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go, and in the cloud by day."

Did you ever read anything more beautiful than that? It is one of those things that absolutely master me. God going in front; what for? Choosing them a place in which to pitch their tent. They have struck their tents, and given up their plans, obedient to the disturbing voice of His government. Then what does He do? He goes in front and shows them the next place. At nightfall the cloud stands still and changes into a pillar of fire, giving them light.

There is nothing haphazard or accidental in such a life. God's people move in a plainly marked pathway, step by step. The government of God not only disturbs them,

and disturbs them for progress, but every inch of the way He has arranged for them.

O men and women, as we ask you to submit to the government of God, remember this: God is not making an experiment with you. We are not pawns upon a chessboard, moving which, God may win or lose. Every move is arranged. I did not know what was to come to pass to-day, but God was in this day before I came into it. Doing what? Choosing the place for me, making arrangements, controlling everything. If your life is under the divine government, do not forget that every day you come to, God has been preparing for you. Do you believe it? Is God sending you to some foreign land? God is there getting ready for you to come. God goes in front as well as behind me. He is my rearward, but He is also in front, choosing, selecting, planning, arranging everything for me.

It is something to be thankful for, then, if God is disturbing me that I may progress, and if He is all the way marking out the path before me. There can be no accident to such a man. Nothing can go wrong in the life surrendered to such a divine government. A disturbing element, a progressive element,

and yet, thank God, a government that makes no experiments, but that moves along lines of perfect order.

Now, what is my relation to this government of God? I can put it in very few words: First, I should be always ready; and second, I should move the instant the word comes. That marks the line of wisdom. Ready to be disturbed if God disturbs; immediate obedience when He calls.

Now I do not think that any one can possibly say, "But that is very hard." It would be hard if we did not know God, and if we did not know that the disturbance is for progress, and that the progress is along lines definitely marked and divinely arranged. Oh, the inexpressible comfort, the absolute rest of life, to men and women who say:

"If God disturb me to-morrow, in being disturbed is my chief rest, because I know that when He moves it is to higher reaches of life, to better positions beyond; and though the ultimate issue of this present disturbance may be far on, every mile of the journey He has chosen, and every place where I pitch my tent He has selected for me."

That is the kingdom in which I want to

live; that is where I want to abide perpetually. I want to be a man waiting for the disturbing element, responsive to the progressive element, rejoicing in the methodical element, by which God leads me day by day and hour by hour.

And, beloved, how may we mark our folly? By doing just what Israel did. They were characterised by wisdom at first. They struck their tents and moved, but at last they came up to the borders of this land that God had told them to go in and possess, and then they began to doubt the King; they began to wonder whether He knew His business. When they reached the borders of the land, they said:

"We will send men in to spy out this land."

When the men came back with the report that there were giants and walled cities, those who up to that point had been responsive to the divine government, said:

"Ah, well, you see God did not understand this when He sent us here. We cannot go on. He did not know that there were walled cities; He had no idea of the giants."

Did they not say that? They said, "*We*

had no idea," which is the same thing. If they had believed that God knew, and had been moving before them, choosing the place, what would they have cared for walled cities and giants? Some of you have obeyed thus far. God has said to you, "Ye have tarried long enough in this mount." He has broken up your nest somewhere. You strike your tent and start; but there comes a moment when you say:

"But somebody tells me that ahead are giants and walled cities."

So there are; it is quite true; but the giants are for you to slay, and the walled cities are for you to live in. The God Who disturbed you did it in order that you might come into possession of that very land; and if you live in His government, rest assured that for every step of the way that lies ahead He will move before you, and choose the place, and equip you for life and for service.

But it was a very sad business for these people. They disobeyed God, and were sent back. What then? They thought they would go and try by themselves. They were defeated and driven back, and for nearly forty years they had to stay in that

wilderness instead of possessing the land straightway.

Now, in conclusion, I want to ask this one pointed question of my own heart and of yours: Where do we stand in relation to this government of God? You may have just heard the voice saying, "Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain," and He marks for you a new course of life. It is as clear as the sunlight in the blue. Wherever there are hearts waiting for the voice of God, that voice is to be heard. You know what God wants you to do. Now, what are you going to do? I beseech you for your own sake, as well as for the glory of the kingdom of God, that you do not stop to count the cost of obedience, but that you say:

"He bids me go, and I go."

That is the spirit which has brought men into the places of heroism and victory.

You know the old story of Luther; when he was warned against going to Worms, he said:

"Though every slate on every house were a devil, I would go."

God had marked the path, and he was bound to go.

If you begin to count the cost, you are in the place of peril. It is the man who says to the King, "At thy word, O King, in the face of what seems to be a combination of circumstances that must wreck me completely, I will go." You need have no fear, for He goeth before you to choose you out a place in which to pitch your tent, and the life abandoned to God is in perfect safety forevermore.

But perhaps you heard that voice speaking to you years ago, and you disobeyed, and you have been in the wilderness ever since. You have been away from the land towards which God was sending you forward to possess it. Thank God, He is full of tender compassion, and graciousness, and all He asks is that you go back to the point of disobedience, and obey. God's path led that way, and you turned from it; go back. You know how you got off the definitely marked pathway, and missed the place that God had chosen for you to pitch your tent. Go back, man, and go along that path.

But you say: "That path is thorny and rough."

Tramp it; for, mark you, you will find that whenever you put your foot upon a thorn,

another foot has been there first and taken off the sharpness; and whenever you begin to tramp a rough piece of road in obedience to the divine voice, another by your side will take the roughness from it, and you will simply walk in perfect harmony with Him Who is your perpetual companion in the way of His own marking out. God not only goes before me to choose me a place, He walks with me along the pathway, and leaning on His strength, then am I strong.

One word more. There may be some to whom all this is as a foreign tongue. You have never heard the voice of God, and say: "The day of miracles is past. I am never disturbed. I make my own plans and live where I please and do as I like. What do you mean by a disturbing element?"

Beloved, you are living still among the fleshpots and the garlic of Egypt. You are still in slavery. Oh, if men could but see themselves! The man who does as he likes is the greatest slave. The man who never does as he likes is God's free man. You know no disturbing voice? God never points out for you a pathway altogether different from the one you had planned? Then, my

brother, you are living still in the land of slavery, in the land of darkness. Back to your King! In His government alone lies safety, in His government alone is the place of life, and light, and liberty, and love. Any man who lives outside this government of God is in the place of dust and ashes and emptiness. Oh, back to your King!

O men, O women, my brethren, my sisters in Christ, those of you who have never yet submitted to Him, come under His control actually and positively. Fling away your theories, and get into the actuality of this business, and let God govern your life, disturb you, mark for you your progress, and prepare for you your sphere of service. He will call you away from some loved relationship, from some cherished habit, and will say, "This is the way." As you look at the pathway, you will think that it is a hard one; but as you begin to tread it, you will find that He is with you, and every step is leading you into finer air, and larger life, and more infinite possibilities.

Redeeming the Time.

CHAPTER VII.

Redeeming the Time.

Ephesians, chapter v., 15 to 18, inclusive: "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit."

These verses form the setting of a passage which is full of value as revealing the responsibility of Christians; "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Instead of "Redeeming the time," the margin has, "Buying up the opportunity." That is a clearer translation of the original word; and I intend to use it as conveying the thought in the mind of the apostle, "Buying up the opportunity, because the days are evil."

"Buying up." The word so translated comes from another word, which means "the market-place." In rural districts the market is often held upon one day of the week, some-

where in the center of the town, sometimes under cover, sometimes in the open; and to that common meeting-place those come who have goods to offer for sale and those who desire to purchase, and there they transact their business. In eastern towns the same habit obtained. The merchantman came to the market-place in the center of the town, bringing his wares with him, there to transact his business; and he watched the market, and waited for a favourable opportunity, either to buy or sell, and when the opportunity presented itself he acted with promptitude. He bought up his opportunity.

Now, the apostle tells those who are the children of God to buy up the opportunities, because the days are evil. You cannot have carefully read the epistles of Paul without having noticed how he never forgets the relation that exists between doctrine and duty. He perpetually lays down for us great principles of life, and unfolds before us the great truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But he never does so in order that men and women may possess the knowledge as theorists merely —he always does it in order that he may lead on to a practical application of the truth he

declares. The apostle never forgets that the wonderful sanctifying force is the force of truth. Take his epistles and look through them, and you will find invariably that there is a statement of some great doctrine, and then you come to the point in the epistle where he uses his favorite word "Wherefore," and from that point he begins to apply his doctrine to the details of daily life.

This epistle to the Ephesians may well be spoken of as the epistle of vocation. In it the apostle unfolds the truth concerning vocation, and then endeavors to set their eyes upon God's ultimate purpose for them, and when he has done so through the first and second and third chapters, you find that the fourth chapter opens thus:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling."

The vocation is declared in the opening part of the epistle. The effect that the holding of the truth of that vocation would have upon daily life is declared in the after part of the epistle. He begins by taking us to the heights of vision; then he brings us to the every-day level of life, and shows us how the vision, unfolded before us, should affect

us, as fathers, and children, and masters, and servants.

A charge has been made against certain ministers during recent years that their preaching has been "other-worldly." I am not perfectly sure that we have not been too much afraid of that taunt. The moment the Church of Jesus Christ ceases to be "other-worldly" she loses her power to affect this world. It is only in proportion as we have a true view of the heavenly calling that we are able to touch the earth upon which we live, as men and women of power. It is only as we realise that everything that transpires to us in the little while between our conversion and the coming of Jesus Christ, all the service rendered and all the lessons learned, is to prepare us for the higher service that lies beyond, that we shall ever be able to render service at its fullest and best upon this earth. I dwell upon that in opening because it lends force to the present duty as laid down in this verse:

"Buying up the opportunity, because the days are evil."

This first thought must be the very background of all our study. Paul, in these open-

ing chapters, has written down the great truth, that the Church of Jesus Christ will only reach its full sphere of service when it has left behind it the temptation, and the sin, and all the various experiences of these passing years. Not to-day can we render our full service, but in God's great to-morrow, when (as Paul shows in this epistle) the Church of Christ, the catholic Church, the Church redeemed out of the earth, gathered into eternal union with Christ in the heavens, has become the minister of the grace of God to the ages that are yet unborn; a medium through which God shall unfold in perfect clearness to principalities and powers in the heavenly places His own wisdom and His own power. We are a heavenly people sojourning upon the earth; and therefore, through us, the light of the heavenly is to fall upon the earthly. The powers of the world to come are to touch the present age through the men and women who are sons and daughters of the world to come, and who will only find the fulfillment of their highest vocation when that eternal day breaks beyond the mists and beyond the shadows.

Now, with that thought in mind, remembering that we are a heavenly people called to

vocation in the heavens, how are we to act upon the earth? The second half of the epistle answers the question. I choose to take from it this one word, expressing our present duty and privilege: "Look therefore carefully how ye walk"—note the connection with the opening injunction:—"I beseech you to walk worthy of your vocation"—"Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; buying up the opportunity, because the days are evil."

Notice, first of all, the reason that Paul gives why Christian men and women should buy up the opportunity: "Because the days are evil."

Now, if we had come into Ephesus as it then was, and had told the leading men of the city that they had fallen in their lives upon evil days, they would angrily have resented the charge. They would probably have said:

"There never was such a time for Ephesus as this. We were never so prosperous as we are to-day. We were never as wealthy as we are to-day. Progress has marked the past, and to-day we are rich and wealthy."

At that time there was a very peculiar combination in Ephesus. Commerce and

religion had been united—that is, of course, the religion of Ephesus. The great temple of their worship was also the banking-house of the merchants, and as the merchants poured their wealth into the temple for safe custody, that became an act of worship. Men were perfectly satisfied with themselves in Ephesus, and thought it was a day of prosperity and a day over which they might rejoice; but Paul was writing, not to the citizens of Ephesus, not to the rank and file of the people who dwelt there, but to the Church of Jesus Christ, to the children of God, to the men and women of heavenly vocation; and writing to them, he said:

"The days are evil."

So they were. They were evil to the men and women who had turned their backs toward idols, to serve the living God. The prosperity of Ephesus was the adversity of the church. That in which the men of Ephesus made their boast rendered the days evil to the called-out, separated, sanctified men and women whom God was preparing for the high vocation that lay beyond, in the heavens.

The apostle says to these people, "You are to buy up the opportunities." This great

message comes to us. Our calling is a heavenly calling. The life of Christ, bestowed in conversion and coming in in all its fullness in the moment when we fully surrendered to Him, subduing us unto Himself, is preparing us for the high calling that lies beyond. For the present moment the word to us is, that we are to buy up the opportunities, and just as surely as the apostle said to these people of Ephesus, the days are evil, so also for us the days are evil.

Now, in what sense are the days in which we live evil days? The world is perfectly satisfied. We are constantly being told there never was such an age as this, an age of progress, an age of advancement, an age of enlightenment. There was a danger of some men dying of pride before the last century ended, because it had been such a wonderful century. The dawn of the new century has increased rather than diminished that pride. Our cities have marks of progress on every hand. Our commerce is more wonderful than it ever was, and throughout the land you hear the voices of men and women telling you that these are the best days, days full of hope characterised by progress, days in which the

race may be perfectly proud of themselves; and yet in these day the message comes to us, "Evil days!"

Now analyse the thought for a moment or two. The majority of the men with whom you come into contact in ordinary business life are not godly, but ungodly. You are bound to mix with them, as matters stand in our cities and in our daily life to-day. Please do not misunderstand me. I do not say that these men are all disreputable, or profligate, or fallen. Never forget that a vast amount of the ungodliness of this age, as of every other, is cultured and refined; but it is none the less ungodliness. You can have an ungodliness which is educated, and cultured, and refined, and accomplished, but it is ungodliness—and I say the majority of the people with whom you come in daily contact are ungodly people. The days are evil days, then, in that sense, for the development of Christian character.

Take the activities of your own life for a single moment in this age when we have got away from simplicity, when we are living a terribly complex life. Did you ever try how little you could live on for one single week in

your life? Did you ever discover how you are almost compelled by the very character of the age in which you live to give hours' thought and attention every day to an enormous number of things which you could very well do without, material things all of them, with no touch of spirit in them? What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed? These are the questions that we are bound to face to-day, in a measure in which our forefathers did not have to face them. All this is far from being helpful to spirituality. These are evil days.

Then we are told that this is the age of progress. It is the age of rush, of movement, of effort. The old sacred art of contemplation and meditation is almost dead. It is the age when men and women are trying to live, even within the church, by dissipating and exciting forms of so-called religious services. The old solemn hours of quiet loneliness with God, that made the saints of the past, are almost unknown. We are carried up and borne forward before we know it, upon the rush that characterises the times. Oh, when men and women come to me, as they do sometimes, and tell me, "What we

need in the Church is just to catch the spirit of the age and keep level with it," I say:

"In God's name, no! What we need is to be led by the Spirit of God, and that will send us against the spirit of the age, and never along with it."

All the rush and restlessness of the age that have crept into the Church of Jesus Christ mark these days as evil days.

The general atmosphere in which we are surrounded is against the government of God. Do not let us deceive ourselves. Do not let us have meetings and sing the praises of what we have done and where we have reached to. I tell you that if Jesus of Nazareth came back to London and preached the Gospel He preached in Jerusalem, they would crucify Him quicker than they did in Jerusalem. If He came again with the same words, the same teaching, the same actual statements of divine will and government, He would find no room for Himself in the very cities that bear the name of Christian to-day. I repeat that the very atmosphere in which we live is against the government of God; and the most terrible thing is this, that while men are against the government of God, they are praying, "Thy

kingdom come; Thy will be done." The most terrible blasphemy of the age is not the blasphemy of the slums, but the blasphemy of the temple, and the church, and the place of worship, where men pray these prayers and then go out to deny every principle of divine government in their lives. And Christian men and women are living in the midst of all this, and the message that came to men at the church at Ephesus is the message that comes to us, "Buy up the opportunities, because the days are evil."

Now, do you see what the apostle says? He says that the fact that these are evil days, is one which positively creates our opportunities. All these contrary facts are to be treated as opportunities for prosecuting the commerce of God. God calls you, God calls me, God calls every child of His, to be His representative in the world, taking hold of the things that seem to be against the development of spiritual character and turning them into opportunities for prosecuting His work upon the earth. And when we have said all we have said concerning the days, we have simply laid down the foundation upon which we may build for God. We have simply

stated the opportunities which throng upon every side for doing His business and buying up the opportunities for Him.

Take any of those I have spoken of. Do I say that the majority of the men that you are surrounded by every day are ungodly men? Every ungodly man that you do business with is an opportunity that you may buy up for God, if you will; an opportunity for the display of your godliness upon his ungodliness.

But you ask: "How are we to do it? We have no time to be talking to these people about religion."

I won't say anything about that. I personally believe that the gift of personal dealing with men and women is a great gift earnestly to be coveted; but apart from the actual definite saying of words, for which I am not pleading for the moment, if you are a truly godly man, your godliness will tell upon ungodliness without your speaking a single word. I am not saying that business men should always put tracts into their letters; I do not know that it would be wise. I am asking that the business man should remember:

"I belong to the heavens, and when I

touch the earth I must touch it with the equity of the heavens. When I sell goods I must bring into my transaction the righteousness of the heavens. If I sell a certain measure over the counter, I must remember that the God of the heavens to which I am going for higher service hates an iniquitous measure and an unjust scale; and into every transaction of my business I am to bring the principles that make the foundation of the heaven of God. I must bring into all those transactions the principles of righteousness upon which God is building His city and accomplishing His work. I am to make a name for Jesus Christ in my business. I am so to transact my business amid ungodly men that they shall say, 'You can trust that man because he is a Christian.' "

There will be a great revolution before that day comes. People do not say that now, alas! And we—because we have labelled men Christians who are not Christians, because we have said these men are God's own children who are not His children, because we have a false label on the nation, and a false label on men, and a false label everywhere—we are causing the very name of

Christ to be blasphemed. What we need is, that the true children of God, the members of the Church with the light of the heavenly calling upon them, should take hold of ungodly men, and should look upon them as an opportunity for influencing them by the godliness of their own lives.

So with the activities of life. Jesus Christ was no ascetic. No Christian man has any right to attempt to create saintliness of character by hiding himself from the activities of every-day life. No. I must live in my home, but that home must have upon it the stamp of the heavens. I must mix among my friends, but my contact with my friends is to be that which will draw them towards God. I very well remember when I was married, my father came into my home. He was a Puritan, and I used to think that it was hard lines that he was; but to-day I thank God for it. He came into my home soon after I was married, and looked around. We showed him into every room, and then, in his own peculiar way, he said to me:

"Yes, it is very nice; but nobody will know walking through here whether you belong to God or the devil."

I went through and looked at the rooms again, and I thought, "He is quite right"; and we made up our minds straightway that there should be no room in our house henceforward that had not some message—in picture, or text, or book—for every comer, which should tell them that we, at any rate, would serve the King.

It is our privilege to take the home in which we live, all the recreations which we have, and turn them into opportunities for manifesting godliness. We should take all those things and let the light of the heavenly fall upon them: we should go through life showing how all the things of the earth may shine in new beauty as the glory of the heaven falls upon them. Everything in life is to be an opportunity for prosecuting the commerce of God.

The unrest of the present age is a glorious opportunity for manifesting the quietness and the calmness of the secret place of the Most High. Oh, for quiet men and women, men and women that know how to be at peace in the midst of the strife! We know a few. That man who, whenever he walks into the committee meeting, brings heaven's calm as

he comes. His words are few, but his presence tells. As he comes you feel that you are coming into contact with one who, amid the rush, and the bustle, and the hurry of a godless age, dwells in the secret place of the Most High, and abides under the shadow of the Almighty. A blessed thing to have men and women who have learned the secret of quietness, and so buy up the rush of the age and turn it into account for a manifestation of the peace and the quietness of God!

But if I am to take all life in this way, if I am to seize these opportunities as they go and come, and turn them into account for God, there are certain facts that I must bear in mind: the responsibility that lies upon me that I see the opportunity in the first place, and seeing the opportunity, that I should be willing to make some sacrifice in order to possess it; and that if I am to see an opportunity and make a sacrifice in order to possess it, I must maintain perpetually a right attitude before God, living forevermore in the power of the heavenly calling, and allowing Him to have His way with me and do His own work through me. Now there are just three laws revealed in the surrounding verses

which condition the prosecution of this commerce of the heavens. Let me very briefly point them out to you.

1. The first is in the fifteenth verse. Men and women who are going to do God's work, "Look therefore carefully how ye walk." "Walk circumspectly," the old version has it. Look carefully how ye walk.

My dear brother, my dear sister, you cannot do God's work in the world, buying up opportunities for Him, transacting His commerce, if you are careless and indifferent about it. Look therefore carefully how ye walk. I know men and women who are very careful when they are at home and awfully careless when they get away from home. I know other men and women who seem to imagine that they can live the Christian life and do God's work without carefulness in the small details of every-day life. If I am to translate my life into service for God, not merely in the deeds done in connection with the church, but in all hours, I shall only do it as I live carefully day by day.

That word "circumspectly," what does it mean? Let me give an illustration, which I believe originated with Mr. D. L. Moody,

which is very quaint and forceful of what it is to walk circumspectly:

You have sometimes seen the top of a wall covered with mortar, and in the mortar pieces of glass are stuck all the way along, so as to prevent boys from climbing and going along. You have also seen a cat walk along the top of that wall. That was walking "circumspectly." How it picked its way! With what carefulness it put down the foot every time. It made progress by walking very carefully, and looking for each place where the foot was to be put among those pieces of glass.

You and I have to walk like that, if we are going to do anything for God in the world. You can't go through a single day carelessly and let things go as they will. Every step must be watched. Every moment must be held as sacred for God, and we are ever to live in the power of the thought that we may miss an opportunity. We must take every moment as an opportunity that needs watching and buying up carefully. We must walk circumspectly.

2. Then the second law of this commerce of God is to be found in the seventeenth verse:

"Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." That is to say, if I am to do this business of God as a Christian man, I am not only to be careful about it, but I must have keenness, shrewdness. I must know the will of God. I must form the habit of discovering the will of God.

You remember that wonderful word about the Messiah uttered by Isaiah long before He came: "He shall be quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord." One Bible student says this might be rendered, "He shall be keen of scent in the fear of the Lord"—discovering the will of God quickly by a kind of intuition.

You only discover the will of God as you obey it the moment you do discover it. It is in proportion as I walk carefully, obeying the will as it is unfolded, that I become quick to discover the will. We are not to foresee; we are to understand the will of God. We are to be a people shrewd, keen, having in our Christian life—having in our prosecution of this work of God—a spiritual acumen which is as necessary as business acumen to the man that is going to make his fortune in business.

3. And then there is another thing. I

must not only be careful, shrewd, and keen, understanding the will of the Lord; but I must have capital, or I never can do God's work in the world. I cannot be a merchantman for heaven unless I have heaven's capital, and here it is in the eighteenth verse:

"Be not drunken with wine, ... but be filled with the Spirit."

When a man is filled with the Spirit, he has the capital of God, to do the work of God. Then all that I have spoken of will become easy and natural. It will become—I was going to say second nature; I will say something better—it will become first nature. It will be perfectly natural to influence men toward God. This great subject of influence, we have heard about it since we have been children, but we have hardly begun to understand or tell it. We have never seemed yet to grasp this truth, that the influence a man exerts is the influence of what he actually is in himself. You talk about keeping up appearances. You talk about living straight before men. You say, "Well, I wouldn't like to do this, that, or the other before men, because I must keep up an appearance or I will lead them wrong." It doesn't matter.

Do what you are; because whether you do or not, you will influence men by what you are. Influence is altogether too subtle to be changed by any outward activities. If a man is filled with the Spirit of God he is spiritual, and his influence will be spiritual.

Some years ago I was at work in Hull, England. God was giving us gracious seasons of refreshing, and a man came to me one night and said:

"Do you know, the strangest thing has happened to me!"

Said I: "What has happened?"

He said: "I am a cabinet-maker, and I work at a bench, and another man works by my side. He has worked by my side for five years. I thought I would like to get him to come to some of these meetings, and this morning I summoned up my courage and said to him, 'Charlie, I want you to come along to-night to some meetings we are having down in Wilberforce Hall.' He looked at me and said, 'You don't mean to say you are a Christian?' and I answered, 'Yes, I am.' 'Well,' he said, 'so am I.' "

This man said to me: "Wasn't it funny?"

"Funny!" I said, "no. Is he here?

for if so, both you and he want to get down here and start. You never have been born again."

It is an absolute impossibility for two men born again of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, to work side by side for five years, and neither one or the other find it out. If one man is a Christian and the other isn't, the man that isn't will soon see the difference in the work the Christian man does. Christian men do pure, strong work, and the best work in the world.

"But," you say, "I have had a man working for me who doesn't; and he is a Christian."

No, he isn't! If a man is filled with the Spirit of God, it will be manifest in every action of his life; and if you get this capital behind you, it won't be hard work to influence men for Christ; it will be the necessity of your life. The passion of your soul will be to win another soul for Christ, to weave another garland wherewith to deck His brow, to plant another gem in His diadem; and your life will be doing it as well as your words. You must have the capital of God to prosecute the commerce of God.

And again, that is true about all the activities of life. People often come and ask me questions about amusements:

"Ought we to do this, that, and the other?"

Well, you must only take up amusements in which it is possible for the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus Christ.

You say: "That is very narrow."

No, it isn't; it is very broad. That for me settles a great many questions of amusements. I know young people who make tennis an instrument of the devil. If a man gives himself wholly up to it, so as to neglect other things, and make other people uncomfortable in the world, that isn't Christianity. But that, and kindred kinds of amusement can be had as pure recreation, and so played that the very gentleness and beauty of Jesus Christ shall be manifested in the playing. Every activity of life, which is in itself right and pure, will shine with glory the moment you become a Spirit filled soul; and instead of being narrow and shut up within confined walls, you will be able to see that He has set your feet in a large room. He has unlocked for you all the avenues of life. Filled with the Spirit, you will be able to manifest the

beauty and the glory of the will of God, as against all the rebellion of the age in which we live.

And now I want to press a question on you that you will answer to yourself: How much are you worth?

You know how men usually answer that question. I very well remember in England how we were impressed during one month some years ago by the death of two men, one on this side of the water, and one on that. The man over here was a millionaire, and the other was Cardinal Manning. As I traveled in a train just about the time these two died, I was impressed by hearing several commercial men talking, and they asked:

"Well, how much was he worth?"

"Oh," said one, "so many millions."

"And how much was he worth?" said they of the other.

"Well, he died worth five hundred dollars."

Do you see? We measure things this way: we say a man is worth so much. Don't you see the horror of it now?

What are you worth? I don't ask to know anything about your balance at the bank. What are you worth? What do you possess?

You say: "I possess so much. I possess my home."

No, no, you don't! What do you possess? You only possess the things you have bought for the kingdom of God. You are rich according to the number of the hours which you have bought up. The time redeemed is wealth. Every time you buy up an opportunity for Him, every time your life tells upon an ungodly man, every time your dealings with God shine out in some of the activities of your life, every time by sacrifice you influence a soul towards God, in that moment buying up an opportunity, you invest an hour in God, and with those hours God is making your fortune. You are not worth the things you possess upon the earth. They fade and vanish. They are of the earth, earthy. You are only worth the treasure that you have laid at His gates, the influence which you have purchased by sacrifice for Him. These are the things which mark your value and your work, and make your fortune.

Oh, what a day it will be when God gives us back these fortunes! How surprised some will be when the Master comes and says:

"You bought up an opportunity one day for me. You met a soul that was thirsty on the dusty highway of life, and it was an opportunity for you to show that soul what I would have done if I had been there, and you gave that soul a cup of water. Now here is the result of it," and what it will be, who can tell? God will meet you some day, my brother, and He will say: "Do you remember that day when in your store you might have made ten thousand dollars at a stroke, and you didn't because there was a trick and a twist behind it, and you said: 'No, I will be that much poorer for the kingdom of heaven's sake?'" God will say: "That was your investment. See, this is the result," and He will show you how you helped that day to bring in righteousness, and to move with God towards the consummation of the purposes of His heart of love.

That is how men are making fortunes. Aren't you going in for this sort of business? Aren't you going to take life anew from this time and say, "I am going to make this life a place in which I prosecute heaven's commerce. I will take the opportunities as they come, and buy them up for God. I will take

my home; it is an opportunity which I will purchase for the exhibition of all the beauties of the Christlike character and all the purposes of the divine heart. Life to me henceforth shall be an opportunity for doing God's business and laying up treasure in heaven."

Is that your determination? Then you must go to the King and say, "O King, I want to be Thy merchantman on earth. Give me the capital I need. Give me the filling of Thy Holy Spirit. Then shall all my service be a delight, and I shall be able to take all hours, and all activities, and everything that comes to me, and transmute it from the dross of earth into the gold of heaven."

May God help us every one to be His merchantmen!

Gathering or Scattering.

CHAPTER VIII.

Gathering or Scattering.

We are living in a day that is known as the day of toleration. We have ceased very largely to desire to force our own particular views upon other people save by the methods of persuasion. Torture and excommunication are things of the past. And I believe that there cannot be too much toleration. No man has any right to usurp the judgment throne of Jesus Christ and pass sentence upon his fellow-men. But while this is perfectly true, we cannot forget that the very freedom of the atmosphere in which we live has produced in individual life something of indifference to the truth of God. Much as we deprecate any attempt by persecution to compel belief, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the old days of persecution were also the days of purity in the Church of Christ. It is a very remarkable thing that the Church of Christ persecuted has been the Church of Christ pure. The Church of Christ patronised has always become the Church of Christ

impure. The very saddest day in Church history was the day that Constantine espoused the cause of Christianity. When an earthly emperor and empire took upon them to patronise the Nazarene, to say that the religion of the Nazarene should have a position under the wing of the state, that day there passed into Christendom the most damning and blighting influence that has ever touched it. Men and women, when they had to face death for the things that they held, were pure. Men and women who were not prepared to do this kept outside the churches of Jesus Christ. All that has passed away. No one will persecute you now for being a Christian. There is a sense, I know, in which "they that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"; but the old days of fiery tests of faith have passed away, and with their passing, we have entered into a region of peril and danger. The peril and danger that threatens us to-day is that of indifference.

Now, if this be true—and you know it is—it is well for us sometimes to come into the presence of Jesus Christ, and to learn that while no man has any right to pronounce sen-

tence upon us, yet Christ has. And not only has He the right to do that, but in unmistakable language in His teaching He has made a clean line of demarkation between man and man, setting certain people upon one side and certain upon the other. No verse that I know of in the whole realm of the teaching of Jesus Christ is more searching than the thirtieth verse of the twelfth chapter of Matthew:

"He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth."

One can imagine that it fell from the lips of Jesus quietly and calmly, but it is a veritable throne of judgment, dividing men swiftly and surely into two opposite camps, leaving no *via media*, no middle way, no neutral ground. As the Master uttered these words in the old days, and by uttering them divided the crowd in front of Him, so from that time until now, through every successive century, amongst all sorts and conditions of men, this verse has come as the line of divine cleavage, separating men to the right and to the left.

Here in this gathering we are made up of a great many differently circumstanced persons, but as God looks upon us He moves us to the right and to the left. He ranks us

amid the gatherers or the scatterers. No one takes a middle position.

A great and terrible mistake we are constantly making to-day is that of comparing ourselves with ourselves. We test the experience of to-day by the experience of yesterday. We allow ourselves to be puffed up because we think our conduct is a little superior to every one else's. Now, let us be done with all this comparison of self with self and man with man. Let us come to the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ and see what He means, and where we stand in the light of it.

In order that we may rightly do that, we must first of all understand what our Lord meant when He said, "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth." I shall, therefore, consider briefly in the first place the claim that Jesus Christ makes for Himself. Inferentially, and yet with perfect clearness, He sets up on His own behalf a certain very definite claim. In the second place, we shall notice how that claim defines our position.

What is the claim that the Master sets up for Himself? Listen: "He that is not with Me is against Me." So far we have no claim

made; but in order that the statement may be understood He goes on to explain it by saying: "He that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." His claim is that He is the Gatherer. His mission to the world was to gather together.

Having set up this claim for Himself, He proceeds to say to the men and women around Him, that every human being is exercising through life the great force that gathers together with Christ, or that other force, which is of hell, that scatters abroad against Christ. Christ claims for Himself that He is God's Gatherer. Christ says that every man is either with or against Him, gathering or scattering.

Let us take these two things and look at them a little more closely, patiently, and prayerfully, in order that we may understand them. What does the Master mean when He says "gathereth with Me"? In the Gospel of John, the eleventh chapter, forty-ninth and following verses, occurs a passage throwing light on the subject: "A certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account that it is expedient for

you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." I am not interested for the moment in these extraordinary words Caiaphas uttered, but I pass on to that which comes after, and which is an inspired exposition of the priest's words: "Now this he said not of himself; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad." It is thus most explicitly stated that "not the nation only," but "the children of God that are scattered abroad" are to be gathered. Jesus Christ came into the world to gather into one the scattered family of the Most High.

Now, turn away from the Gospel narrative and come to the day in which we live. There is a phrase that has been very much on the lips and pens of certain men for the last five and twenty years or more: the "solidarity of humanity." It is one of those phrases that sounds as if there was a good deal in it, and men have made the most of it. They have written books under the impulse of what there is behind that phrase; they have formulated

philosophies, designing them upon that phrase. Trench tells us that it comes to us from the Communists. "The solidarity of humanity." What do they mean when they talk about the solidarity of humanity? It means that humanity is not a gathering together of units, each one separate and alone, but that humanity is one; that all men are dependent upon all other men, and that the race is united from its beginning to its end; that this particular generation of which you and I form a part owes an enormous amount to the generations that have preceded it; that we are helping to make the history of the generations that are coming after us; that what Kingsley sang about the new-born babe is perfectly true; that that child is "heir of all the ages." Not only is humanity one when you trace it in its movements through history, but in its relationship to-day. Every nation of the world is linked to every other nation of the world. We owe something to other men; other men owe much to us. "No man liveth unto himself." The race is one, bound up by bonds that cannot be broken.

Now, if Trench is right, that we get that phrase from the Communists, the truth that

is enshrined in it we do not get from the Communists. It is a divine truth. It is a revelation of the purpose and thought of God for humanity.

What is God's thought for the human race? Hear it in these words of inspiration: "He hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth." The divine ideal for humanity is, that humanity is to be one family; that man should serve his brother man, and in that service find his purest delight; that man should make perpetual acknowledgment every day and always of his indebtedness to his fellowmen; that there should be no self-consciousness and self-seeking which is at the expense of the right and the comfort and the blessedness of other men. That is the divine ideal. It is upon that ideal of humanity as a whole that Jesus Christ based all His work and all His teaching; and that the apostles of Jesus Christ prosecuted their mission in the world.

But is this realised? As I have said, men are writing about it. America has produced some men who have dreamed wonderful dreams on this very line. There has lately passed to his rest a most remarkable man,

Edward Bellamy, whose books I have read with keen interest, and have detected beneath them the aspiration of a great heart after a divine ideal that he never understood; and the trouble is, Edward Bellamy wanted to get society into the kingdom of God without taking it by the way of the cross of Jesus Christ, and he could never do it. He and other dreamers of beautiful dreams, in which men shall lose the miserable idea that any work is dishonorable, wanted to pass into that realm outside the actual, positive, interfering government of God; and it can never be done. You cannot grow the tulips of the kingdom of God except you get the bulbs from heaven. Never forget that.

The fact is, that is an ideal, a dream. How about the realisation? There is a great disintegration of humanity. We are broken up; we are split; we are divided. Look where you will you see that the divine ideal of the human race is lost. I do not want to be misunderstood at this point, but I feel that you are ready to take a high and spiritual outlook upon these things, and that you will bear with me patiently when I say that nationality is a poor business; that patriotism is some-

thing that perhaps is necessary for to-day, in the midst of the chaos and break-up of the great ideal of God for humanity, but that in the day when the King shall reign we will talk no more about my nationality as against yours. We shall enter into the larger ideal that we are one, the round world over; that every man with the image of God upon him, the breath of God in him, is a brother man, to be loved and served and cared for. We shall pass away from the idea that because we are a great and mighty nation we have any business to override and destroy other nations that are weaker than we are. We shall learn that every man has rights because he is a child of God, and we shall respect them. But that time has not come yet. If you want to know something about the disintegration of humanity as against the solidarity of humanity, see the civilised, the Christianised (God forgive us for abusing the word!)—the Christianised nations of Europe watching each other with a suspicion that is devilish and horrible. There is nothing of the Spirit of Christ in it.

Come down from the national outlook and consider the home. There is nothing that is saddening me more in England to-day than

the break-up of our home life; that the old family circles that made a poet write these words, "The heart has many a dwelling-place, but only once a home," are passing away from our country. Children are growing away from their parents, and parents from their children, and the old strong bands that made up a strong nation because we were strong in our family relationships are being broken. Everywhere there are marks of disintegration.

Then come into the Church of God. Do you get any comfort out of the division in the Church of God? I hope you don't. I hope you have never said that it is part of the divine plan that Christendom should be split into a thousand fragments. I tell you it isn't. He Who prayed the great intercessory prayer which took hold of heaven in my behalf and your behalf for all time, said, "Father, I will that they may be one, that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me." We are not one, and that is why the world doesn't know that God sent Jesus.

Come down into the detail of life, and you will find the same break-up everywhere; that instead of there being oneness in the human

family, there is infinite division and infinite distrust. Men do not trust each other in commerce or in social life or in church life. Everywhere there are the marks of a great disintegrating force, which has broken humanity into a thousand parts, and the great ideal of the oneness of the race is lost.

Christ came to gather together into one the children of God that are scattered. That was His mission. How is He going to do it? He will do it, as God does everything, fundamentally. He will never tinker with externals; He will go to the heart of the matter. He will never attempt to paint on the outside that which is rotten. He will demolish that which is old, and He will bring in better things. And how does He do it? He comes into the midst of men Himself to reveal God, to restore the divine government, to do battle in His own life and in His cross and passion, with the sin that has divided humanity.

That was His mission. He came to gather together. He came to wipe out the lines that create nationalities, and bring us back into the one family of God; to bind together into closer harmony the families of the earth; to heal the breach between man and man; to drive away

from the earth every form of difference and dissension.

But some one says, "Didn't He say, 'I am come to send a sword'? "

That was a statement of the necessity of the Gospel He preached. He knew the condition of man, and He knew that His announcement of divine kingship, the only truth that could ever heal the divisions, must, before the great work is completed, scatter the sword, and apparently rend humanity further and further apart. But that rending is only that which precedes the healing, and the sword He sends is the sword which makes way for purity, and opens the door for peace. So He came to gather together.

Oh, how one would like to take up His life and look at it in that light! His teachings, His miracles, look at Him again! Healing wounds, gathering together a few men in the first place, and of them saying, "Who is My mother, and who are My brethren? Those who do My Father's will." What did He mean? He meant to say, Here is the higher relationship, above the relationship of blood, the relationship of spiritual affinity in the kingdom of God; and mother and brethren pass

out of sight in the presence of this new relationship. He says to me, as He said to the men then:

"If you are coming after Me, you must leave father, mother, and husband and wife. You must put Me first."

I say, "Master, it is a hard thing to do."

He replies: "But that is what I did for you. I put you before mother and brother. If you come to Me you must do as much for Me as I have done for you."

And so He created that little spiritual circle, and He came to gather others into it, and thank God, His work will never cease until He Himself comes again and establishes the kingdom out of which He will drive all dissension, and into which He will gather the children of God that are scattered abroad. It is the great work of Christ to heal the wounds, to make dissension cease, and to bring the world around Himself into a sacred brotherhood, in the Fatherhood of God. That is the great mission of Christ.

Now I pass to the second point. After that vision of His work, what does He say? "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth."

Gathering or Scattering.

Jesus came to gather, and He says that I am helping or hindering, with Him or against Him; that I am gathering or scattering. Let me say, first of all, that the influence I exert in the world is created by my relationship to Jesus Christ. If I am with Him, I am a gatherer. If I am His and He is mine, if Christ be formed in me actually, what will be the effect? I shall be gathering with Him, bringing men to Him; and in bringing men to Him I am bringing men to each other. Did that ever strike you? The Man stands amid humanity, and is its center of attraction Godward and heavenward. In proportion as men are brought near to Him, in that proportion they are coming near to each other; and any attempt to get men near together, apart from the attraction of Jesus Christ and His power to hold them together, is a dream that cannot be realised. Men have the dream of unity, but they haven't seen the center of attraction to unite them.

And how will it work out? It will begin in your home. You will gather your children together first. It is time some Christians ceased trying to gather men together who live in the slums, and gave their time to getting

their children together. One of my deacons once said to me, casually, lightly, smilingly, as though it was a very pretty, pleasing thing to say:

"Do you know, Mr. Morgan, I don't see my bairns"—and he had two beautiful children—"I haven't seen my bairns awake for several months."

I said to him: "What do you mean?"

"Well," he said, "don't you see, I have been so fearfully busy, business is growing at such a rate, that I am up and off in the morning before they are awake, and I do not get home at night until they are in bed; and on Sunday I am down at the church all day, and I hardly see them then."

I said to him: "My dear brother, for God's sake and for your children's sake, drop something in your business; and if you cannot do that, drop something at the church, and look after your bairns. It is an infinitely better investment to give your time to them and to keep your hand on them than anything else you can do."

A man that cannot hold his family together for Christ by the attractive power of Christ in his own life isn't wanted in the church; let

him keep out. That man cannot do anything for God in public places if his own home is devastated and broken up by the principle of rebellion against God. And if the influence a man is exerting on his family is an influence that scatters, that man is not with Christ. If you are with Christ, hold your bairns for Him, and your family will be God's first circle of the kingdom, as it always has been, and it will be a witness to the power of Christ in you, and through you, to gather men together.

We had a craze across the water a few years ago, an æsthetic craze. Men raved about dandelions and about lilies. Men posed in womanly attitudes and said that they could exist for a week upon a lily. It was neurotic; it was rotten; and the high priest of the whole business, the apostle of the æsthetic craze, had to go to prison as a common prisoner for beastliness of conduct that cannot be named in public. If you try to gather men together by painting a lily on a plate and giving them a sweet willow pattern —oh, God, the mockery of it! You cannot touch men's hearts like that. If you are not with Christ you cannot gather men. I don't care what your philosophy is, what your policy

is, or what the basis of art, or education, or culture, or anything you please. No power the world has ever heard taught or preached, save the power of the crucified, risen Christ, is sufficient to gather men together into one.

You say, "Can't we improve the dwellings of the poor?"

Yes, God help us to do it; but one of the best ways to do it is to improve the man that lives in the dwelling.

I remember some years ago conducting a mission, and one of the office-bearers of the church where I was, said to me:

"Mr. Morgan, I want you to come and see some people. A girl was married out of our Sunday school three years ago, to a man who is a slave to drink and impurity and gambling. I would like you to come along and see her."

I went—it was in '85—on a cold February day, to see that girl. Oh, I cannot picture the home to you! It was one of those awful houses in the midlands of England, reached by passing through an entry between other houses, into a back court. When I got to the entry with my friend, some children who were hovering and shivering there, hearing

our steps approaching, rushed away. We followed them and went into the house. I see that room now. There was a broken table standing there, a chair with the back broken off standing by it, no fire in the grate; upon the mantel-shelf a cup and saucer, broken; and not another article of furniture that my eye rested on in that room. And there stood a woman in unwomanly rags with the mark of a brutal fist upon her face, and three ill-clad bairns clinging to her gown. She said:

"Excuse the children running from you, but they thought that it was father."

Oh, the tragedy of it!

When I got on to the rostrum that night to preach, my friend came to me and said:

"He is here."

I said: "Who is here?"

"That woman's husband; he is sitting right down in front of you."

Now, I don't often preach at one man, but I did that night. I put aside what I was going to talk about, and read the story of the prodigal, and I asked God to help me talk about it, and for about a solid hour I preached at that man. Do you think I hammered at

him and scolded him? Not I. I told him God loved him, there and then; and when we got to our after-meeting, I asked, "What man is coming home to-night?" And he was the very first to rise. He came forward, and as I went down from the rostrum and gave that meeting into some one else's hands, and got my arm around him and prayed and wept with him, he entered into the kingdom of God.

My friend said to me one day about twelve months later, "I want you to go and see some people."

I said, "Who?"

He said, "Do you remember going to see a woman last year whose husband was converted? I want you to come and see those people."

I went. We hadn't gone far—it was February of the next year—before I said to him, "Friend, where are you taking me?"

"Oh, we are going to see those people."

"But," I said, "we are not going the same way."

"No," he said, "they have moved."

Moved! Why did they move? Why, the man was converted, and he soon changed his dwelling-place. The man was remade, and he remade his environment; and he had gone,

not into a palace, but into a cottage in the main street.

If I could paint pictures I would paint those two. I can see that home now. It was on a Sunday, after the afternoon service, and he sat by the fire with his three bairns, who had run away from him a year ago. One was on his knee, another on his shoulder, and another stood by him; and I never heard a sweeter solo in my life than the solo the kettle sang on the hob that day. The woman that last year was dressed in unwomanly rags was clothed, and the sunlight of love was on her face.

That is how you must deal with the problem of environment. Begin at its middle. Touch the man who makes the beastly environment, and remake him, and he will soon move out of the tenement-house and out of the slum; he will soon find his way on to higher levels. That is the way to gather men and women. Unless you are with Jesus Christ, you can try education and culture, but it all comes short of life, and without life there is no remaking of men.

Now, my brother, are you with Christ in this enterprise?

My last word is a reversal of that position. And now we come to this text as to a judgment-seat. It is not only true that your influence will be created by your relationship to Jesus Christ; it is also true that your relationship to Jesus Christ is revealed by the influence you are exercising.

I am getting less and less anxious to hear what men say. What is the influence you are exerting in the world? Show me a man who is gathering men, who is healing wounds, who is closing up breaches, who is coming into life with a sacred, subtle, forceful mien which makes men love each other because he is there, that man is with Christ. I am not particular whether he spells his denomination with a P or C, or anything you like; the point is whether he is gathering men. May God help us to drop trying to order men out of service because they do not follow with us.

You say, "You know it is apostolic."

I am not particular about being in apostolic succession; they made such miserable blunders right along. Go back to the ninth chapter of the Gospel of Mark. John said unto Christ:

"Master, we saw one casting out devils."

"Oh, did you? You must have been glad, John."

"Yes, and in the name of Jesus."

"Blessed work! Glorious work! I want to know that man."

"We saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbade him."

"Why, why?"

"Because he followed not after us." "Followed not us," it really is. "Because he followed not us."

Jesus said, "Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a mighty work in My name, and be able to speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is for us."

Ah, that is the test! Do you know a man that casts out devils, my dear brother, in the Presbyterian Church, and he isn't a Presbyterian? Don't hinder him. "Oh, no," you say, "we shouldn't think of doing that; he is a Congregationalist." But supposing he isn't that; supposing he is none of your ists and your isms; supposing he is just a man that has got into touch with Christ and hardly knows the truth himself yet. Let him alone! He cannot work a work in the name of Christ and speak evil of Him. If he is not against

the Christ, he is with Him. Take this larger outlook, this practical test of position.

But there is another word, which is part of that last thought: a man who is scattering is not a Christian.

Do you know that man who has lost his children?

"What do you mean? a man that has buried them?"

Oh, no, no! God help him, it would have been better if he had, long ago. He has *lost* them. He has no hold on them, no influence over them. They have gone from his home and scattered, and going from his house they have gone from his God with great relief. They were glad to go away from him so as to get away from his God, and they are swearing against God to-day.

"Why?"

Because of that man's influence.

"But that man is a church member."

I don't care; he isn't a Christian.

"But that man preaches."

I don't care; if he has lost his children it is because he has not been with Christ, but against Him. Show me the man that is splitting and dividing the church, dividing the

nation, setting man against man, that man isn't a Christian. I don't care what his subscription is, what his profession is, what the noise he makes in the world; all these things are nothing. If that man isn't gathering with Jesus, he is scattering; and if he is scattering, he is not *with,* he is *against,* Christ.

So much for the teaching of that verse, as I understand it. Now, where are you, and where am I? Am I with the Master, or am I against Him?

You say: "Well, I am not exactly with Him, but I am not against Him."

You are wrong. There is no middle place.

"Oh," you say, "there must be a middle place. I have never done anything for Him; I have never led a soul to Him; I have never preached for Him or spoken for Him, or given a tract away for Him, or even given a cup of cold water for His sake; but I have never hindered Him; I haven't spoken against Him; I haven't denounced Christianity."

Some of you have been in London. When you visit London again, get down in the center of the great city and stand still and look in a window. You won't be there long be-

fore a man in blue will put his hand on your shoulder and say:

"Please move on."

"Why should I move on?"

"You are blocking the traffic."

"I am not interfering with any one."

"Your standing still and doing nothing is going to cause an obstruction here; you must please move on. Keep moving. You can go that way, or you can go that, but you cannot stand still; you must move."

My brother, my sister, you cannot stand still. The moment you stand still and say, "I am just going to be an interested onlooker," you become an obstacle in His way, you retard His progress. If you stand, some one else is going to stand. Don't you know that? You can't stand still without impeding progress. If you are not with Him, you are against Him. If you are not exercising the great force that gathers, by your very negation of that, you are exercising the force that scatters men here and there and everywhere.

Men and women, will you take sides? Cease trying to be neutral, I pray you. Whether you have ever before professed to be a Christian or not, I care not. I appeal

to you now. I call for men and women to take sides definitely and positively in this matter. The great Lord Jesus, sweet and strong, tender and mighty, came from heaven to earth to gather men together, and He says every one is helping Him or hindering Him. Which is it?

Do not say, I beseech you, "It is no use for me to pretend to take sides with Christ; I can do so little."

It is your life that helps Him, not the extra activity in which you engage now and again. What the Master wants to-day in all the cities and villages of England and America is men and women who are living with Him. America is waiting for the manifestation of the sons and daughters of God; and wherever you are manifested to be related to God in Christ, you become part of the great force that is gathering men together. You contribute by that relationship to God in Christ to the work of Christ in healing wounds, closing up the breaches, and making all the families of the earth one, as God has purposed they should be.

What we want is not to ask men so much to take sides, because they are doing that

whether or no; what we need is to appeal to them to take the side of Christ. Isn't it better to construct than to destroy, to heal than to wound, to gather men than to scatter them? Then will you not be among the number of those who come to the Nazarene and say:

"Oh, Jesus, by Thy infinite compassion, by Thy love passing all human telling, Thou hast conquered me. I am come to Thee. Take my life, poor, weak, insufficient by every standard of human measurement, but let Thy life flow into it, and through it, that my life may make some little contribution to the realisation of Thy great purpose."

Lord Jesus, from to-day let me more than ever be a gatherer of Thine. Prevent me from scattering. Do this, Lord, by taking more complete possession of me than ever before. To this end I yield to Thee all I am, and have, and hope for, in order that through me some part of Thy kingdom may come and Thy will be done. Amen.

Pitching Toward Sodom.

CHAPTER IX.

Pitching Toward Sodom.

"Lot moved his tent as far as Sodom."—Gen. xiii. 12.

While a great many details in the story of Lot are purely local, and their colour has faded, the underlying principles are full of present meaning and present application. And so I propose to ask you to look with me at this man Lot. Lot was a good man who acted upon a wrong principle, with disastrous results. Now, it may be almost a startling thing to say that Lot was a good man. I am bound to confess that if I only had the story of the history that I find in the Old Testament I should hardly have come to that conclusion, but my failure to understand Lot would have been due to my inability to read the story aright. In the New Testament it is distinctly declared that he was "a righteous man."

I repeat, therefore, that this is the story of a good man—good, that is, in intention, good in the deepest desire of his heart, perfectly sincere in many ways, always desiring

to be right, and yet becoming so sadly wrong that to-day he stands out upon the page of Holy Scripture not as an example in whose steps we should follow, but as a warning in order that we may avoid his pathway. What a strange contradiction this is—a good man held up as a warning, a man who meant well, and yet so lived that the one thing we need to be careful of in life is, that we do not live as he lived. Is it not true that there are thousands of such people in the world at the present time? I am not at all sure, that if it were possible for us to analyse the inner life of the great majority of people we should not find them in very much the same condition. They mean well, and think that they would always choose the good and refuse the evil; and yet they are very often doing evil and refusing the good. Strange contradictions they seem to be, men who want to be right, and are wrong; men who admire the things that are high and noble and beautiful, and yet do the things that are low and mean and base.

Lot was such a man, and therefore it must be of great interest, I think, that we should attempt to discover his mistake, to trace it in

its outworkings, that we may be warned from treading in his footsteps.

Now, first of all, let me remind you that this man Lot had been closely associated with Abram from his first move, from his move with Terah from Ur of the Chaldees. Let us go back, and read one or two verses, to give us the sequence of the history. In the eleventh chapter of Genesis, and the thirty-first verse, I read: "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife"—will you notice what happened—"and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan"—but they did not get to Canaan—"they came to Haran and dwelt there." That was the first move, and it would almost seem as though originally the move was not that of Abram, but that of his father Terah. What I want you specially to notice, however, is that Lot was with them.

Now pass on to chapter twelve, and the fifth verse. "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance, that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went

forth to go into the land of Canaan: and into the land of Canaan they came." That was the second move. They waited in Haran until Terah died, and then they moved on again, again starting to go into the land of Canaan, and this time arriving there. Notice specially that Lot was still with them.

Now turn on to the thirteenth chapter, and I read, "And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him," so you see that he had been with Abram when he had gone down into Egypt—something Abram ought never to have done—and after that Abram came up out of Egypt. Lot was still with him, and now we come to that crisis in the lives of the two men, when they parted from each other, and it is in this connection that the true character, both of Abram and Lot, is revealed before us.

Notice the crisis for a moment. Domestic difficulties had arisen, which had in them elements of discord. Abram and Lot had become very wealthy. The herdsmen of the two men quarrelled over the pasturage of the flocks. Abram, with the magnanimity of a great soul, and the foresight of a great statesman, said to Lot, "Let there be no strife, I

pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

It is under these circumstances that the true character of Lot is manifested. He lifted up his eyes, and he saw the well-watered plain of the Jordan; and he saw down there on the plain the cities in which the men of the plain had congregated, and were living for commercial pursuits, and the making of wealth, and he chose to move in that direction, and in that choice we have a revelation of the man. Parting company from Abram, "he pitched his tent," as the Old Version has it, "toward Sodom."

Now, these are small matters. First of all it was a very small matter that created the crisis which manifested the character of Abram and Lot, and the choosing of this particular place was a small matter. The crises that test men are always small. A man is never revealed when he is prepared for the occasion of examination. We are never really

manifested if we have been notified beforehand that we are going to be examined. Scholastic examinations are really no test of what a man knows. It is true in every department of life, that the test foreannounced and prepared for, sometimes by cramming, is often at fault, when we want to know what a man is or knows. God never foreannounces His examinations. If God were to announce to us to-night that to-morrow at twelve o'clock He would meet us, in order to find out what we were in character, what preparations there would be between now and twelve o'clock to-morrow. How careful we should be to appear at our very best, and the result would be false. What you are flashes out when you do not know any one is likely to be watching you critically. In the small things, in the little details, in the commonplaces of life, character shines out. I never try to find out what a preacher is when he is preaching. It is when he is at home, and when he thinks there is no one there to critically survey, that is the time to find out what he really is. I never want to find out what a deacon is in a deacons' meeting. You do sometimes, but that is not the best time. The time to find

that out is on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, during the week. I do not want to know what your character is when you are singing. I want to find out what your character is when something goes wrong, some little commonplace with your work at home. When you are carried along by the stream of the commonplace, then your character is revealed. The characters of these two men are revealed forevermore, when their servants begin quarrelling. The herdsmen of Abram and the herdsmen of Lot, to use an every-day expression, are just having a row, and on the basis of that quarrel between the herdsmen the character of Abram is revealed and the character of Lot is revealed, and I know what Lot is and what Abram is, in the light of that very unpleasant and absurdly ridiculous quarrel between men whom they employed and paid.

Many a man has been revealed in his true light over quarrels amongst other people, about mere trifles. It was Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that prince of preachers, who once said, "I will find out what pattern your creed is, not when I look at you in the sanctuary, but as I see you on Sunday morning, getting

ready for church, if certain things are not to your hand as you think they ought to be." It was a quaint, forceful, illuminative statement of a great truth about character. I see Lot, and I see Abram, and I see the inner, underlying principle of life in the case of each, and all the subsequent history is true to the revelation of character that flashes out when their herdsmen are quarrelling.

Let us now look at Lot. When I close I shall ask you to look at Abram by way of contrast. But our business is with Lot. First of all we will look at his choice; secondly, we will look at the results that follow his choice; and then conclude by attempting to draw the very evident lessons from the study that may be of profit to ourselves, as we take our way through life.

And first we ask the question, Was it wrong to choose? Certainly not. The supreme dignity of human life is that it is made to choose. The greatest gift that you possess is the gift of will, the fact that there comes to you every day, and every hour, I think I may safely say every moment, something concerning which you have to elect, to decide, to choose. We are not automatic machines.

We are independent, free agents. I can choose heaven or hell. It is a tremendous issue, but it is a magnificent possibility. That is the dignity of human life. If we were but machines, then the romance and the poetry and the passion of life would be at an end. If I must, then I must, and the colours fade from the sky, and everything becomes ashen and grey. It lacks iron, force, vim, virtue. Life is life to me, because I have to choose. There are often moments when we would almost wish that some other could choose for us, and in our childhood's days, though a passion for choice arose, it was a gracious thing that others had to choose for us. But it would be a sorry thing if we always remained children. In the very possession of our being is the right to choose, this capacity for decision, this magnificent power for election. And in life every man must choose. Lot made his choice. What, then, was wrong? Notice carefully the principle of his choice, and the purpose of his choice, as we have them revealed in the actual words of Scripture. I do not want to depart in imagination from Scripture, but will read at the eleventh verse. "So Lot chose

him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east; and they separated themselves the one from the other." Now go back behind that eleventh verse, "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan," and when he looked, what did he see? He saw "that it was well watered everywhere, ... like the garden of Jehovah, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest into Zoar." First you have the purpose of his choice revealed in that very little sentence, that we read so carelessly—"Lot chose him." The central purpose of his choice was that of selfishness. "He chose *him.*" A moment has come in the life of the man when it is necessary for him to choose. He must make a choice, and he proceeds to exercise his will upon the basis of personal desire alone. "He chose him," he chose something for himself, something that should minister to himself. He put outside the realm of the things that actuated him everything except his own desire, and his own desire in these things was that which should minister to his own self-life. There is a revealing sentence, "Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan." He was already a wealthy man. He had gotten great gain while sojourning

with Abram, but he is still seeking gain, and self is the underlying reason.

We see now what was the principle. You may say it was not wrong to get gain. He was already a wealthy man, they were both wealthy. There was surely nothing wrong in gain. Notice here carefully, however, that desiring simply for himself, he is entering upon a compromise between two wrong principles. Again two little sentences manifest this. He sees all the wonderful plain of the Jordan. Notice what two things attracted him—"Like the garden of the Lord," "Like the land of Egypt." Ah, yes, this man has recently been down to Egypt. He has seen its commerce, he has seen its wealth, he has seen its sordidness, he has seen its blinded materialism, and he wants to be able to get gain as the Egyptians are getting gain. He has seen that down in those cities of Egypt gain was gotten faster than it ever can be when living a nomadic life. Here is a quicker way to live and get gain, to live in nearness to a city. Like the land of Egypt, and yet like the garden of the Lord.

What Lot is attempting to do is to bring two things together which are in opposition to

each other. It is the principle of compromise, and when he makes his choice, he does not go straight into Sodom and live there, "he pitched his tent as far as Sodom," and lived near it. You see without multiplication of words what this man is doing. He says in his heart, Now my chance has come. I have been with Abram a long time, I have believed in his God, and in his faith, but he is a little behind the times, he is a little old-fashioned, he is just a wee bit fanatical. I cannot get him away from the tent and the altar. Wherever he goes, he pitches a tent and builds an altar; and presently he moves the tent and the altar. He is always wandering, he is not settled. So I will pitch my tent toward Sodom; I will get as near it as I can. Sodom is wicked. I have no desire to share its wickedness. I am not drawn toward its evil, but I will be near enough to it to get [illegible] out of it. The day Lot pitched his tent as far as Sodom, there is, first, a selfish motive behind his choice, "he chose him"; and there is, moreover, the fact that he tried to compromise, he got his good, and yet got near enough to evil to gain something out of it. I am not at all sure, indeed I am personally in-

clined to believe that when he pitched his tent toward Sodom he hoped not merely to get something out of it, but to put something into it. I may do these people good, I may influence them along my line of life, I may be able to help them, I may be able to use the purity of a simple faith, I may be able to do something to bring them near the true and living God. I am going there to make wealth faster than I can in the old-fashioned way. Abram's God I worship and I love, but I will choose for myself, and I will endeavour to make a compromise to get as near to Sodom as I can in order that I may have the advantage of life "like the garden of Jehovah," and that of the city where wealth may be made faster than it can by men in tents moving from place to place. It was choice based upon purely personal and selfish reasoning.

In the light of things seen, Lot for the moment had shut out of vision the unseen things. He was acting as though this life were all, as though the only thing worth thinking about was wealth, as though the supreme aim of existence was that of becoming more and more wealthy. The man's eyes are fastened upon the earth, and he does not see

the gleaming light of the spiritual realm. He has forgotten the things permanent, and is attempting to grasp the things perishing. "He chose him," and it was a choice selfish and compromising.

But now how did this work out? What followed; what was the sequel? And again I want to read verses, remarkable as revealing the sequel, and easily remembered. Read the text first: "He moved his tent as far as Sodom." Notice that carefully, not into the city, but near it, just near enough to be able to use it. Turn over to the very next chapter, and you will find something else. In the fourteenth chapter, and the twelfth verse I read these words, "Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom." Now, how much time elapsed between my text and that I cannot tell you, but certainly not very long. When he parted from Abram, he did not go into Sodom, he went near it, but in the very next chapter I find that he has moved into Sodom. It is a natural sequence. He went near Sodom in order to make use of it. He was near enough to reap some of its advantages, but it would be so much more convenient if he went in. Now I find him living no

longer in a tent, but in a house; no longer near Sodom, but in the midst of it; no longer separated from Sodom, but mixed up in its life.

Move on, and see how this ends. I go to the nineteenth chapter, and in the nineteenth chapter and the first verse I read these words: "And the two angels came to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom." We read that, and it does not mean to us necessarily and immediately what it ought to mean. "Sitting in the gate" is a peculiarly Eastern phrase, which brings up a picture of Eastern life. It simply means that he had become the chief magistrate in the city. The chief magistrate of these Eastern cities sat in the gate to decide questions of dispute between the inhabitants; and to receive visitors as the representative of the city's hospitality. If you will let me translate that little phrase, "Lot sat in the gate of Sodom," into the language of to-day, into the phraseology more familiar, it is exactly as though it were stated that Lot had become the mayor of Sodom. There had been great advancement. First he pitched his tent toward Sodom, then he dwelt in Sodom, and now he is the mayor of Sodom.

That appears as though he were getting on wonderfully well. He is a great success. If that man lived to-day, his biography would be sold and given away to young men, as an example of how to get on in the world. Oh, this gospel of getting on! I wish I could get rid of it forever. I can almost suggest a title for the book, "From the Tent to the Mayor's Chair; or, How to Get on in Life." I pick up a book and I read, "From Log Cabin to White House." I am not going to cast any shadow on Garfield, but I do say that his greatness was not proved by the fact that he left the log cabin and reached the White House. He was a great man in the cabin. If a man gets on, and gets into position, becomes mayor, president, and thinks that is everything, it is a lie, and the sooner those facing life get rid of such an idea, the better.

I wonder where poor Abram is? He is still there in that old tent by the oaks of Mamre; he has made no progress. He is still pitching his tent and building his altar; he is far behind the times. It is Lot who has got on.

But now I want to talk to this man a little while. I want to ask him a few questions. I

want to put him into the witness-box, and I want you to hear his evidence. Lot, you have made a great success of this. You have pitched your tent toward Sodom, and finding that not to be so convenient as it would be to be in, you went in, and you must have got on wonderfully well if they made you mayor, and put you to sit in the gate. But I want to ask you four things, Lot: How has this move affected your own inner life, your own mind, your own heart? And then I want to ask you how it affected your family, whom you took into Sodom with you? And then I want to know how your coming into Sodom affected Sodom? And then I want to ask the meanest thing—and I put it last, though it might have been asked first—How much money you made out of it by the time you had done? If you want to get on in life, surely these questions are fair. How will your move act upon your heart and conscience, your loved ones, upon the city into which you went, and lastly, how much money will you make from the transaction?

Let us begin with the first. Lot, how about yourself? You are mayor of the city, how about your own heart and mind? And

coming on here to the New Testament I have the answer. Listen. "Lot, distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds)." That is the picture of discontent! Surely when the man got on this way he must have been content. Nay, discontented! Surely when a man moved into the city, and lived amongst them, and became mayor, he had peace. Nay, he vexed his soul, his heart was hot and restless. He had seen the vision of the higher things, and therefore he was never satisfied with the lower. If you want to know where rest is, and peace is, and quietness is, and joy is, it is with old-fashioned Abram up there in the tent, under the oaks, the man who never chose upon the desire of selfishness, but always upon the basis of the divine will and government, and the man who always lived not merely seeing the things perishing, but the eternal things, the infinite and undying things. Lot lost his peace and rest when he went into Sodom. If you have lost your own heart's ease, there is nothing that can make up for it. You may make your for-

tune, you may make your position, you may make money, but if your heart is hot and restless, you will make a disastrous failure of it. An old woman living away up on the wild North coast of my country came to her Christmas Day, and had absolutely nothing for her Christmas dinner upon her table, but a piece of bread and a glass of water. And a Christian person who, thinking of the old lady on that glad day, went to her about mid-day, to take her something, found her already sitting down to her Christmas dinner, which consisted of the bread and the water. She was very hard of hearing and did not notice the footstep of the person who came into her little cottage. But this person heard the old woman ask her blessing. With eyes shut, and hands clasped, and that sweet, ineffable light that never was on land or sea on her face, the old woman said, "O God, I thank Thee for these gifts of Thy love on this Christmas Day. Thou hast given me all these and Christ." You know as well as I do, if you are only true to your own heart, that you would rather have this old woman's heart's ease than all the wealth in the world. What is it worth to a man, if surrounded

with all luxury, and all wealth at his command to minister to every desire of his material body, if his heart is hot and restless, if he vexes himself every day, and is filled with a great hunger that cannot be fed. That was Lot's condition. It was a sad failure, that move of Lot's.

But now, Lot, how about your family? When you turned your back upon Abram, upon the tent, and went to live in Sodom, what about your children? And the story is one that cannot be told. It is too dreadful, too appalling. Let it simply be said that when Lot moved into Sodom, and took his children there, he lost them. Oh, the tender infinite grace of God, as seen in the angel sent to bear to Lot the message of coming destruction. Upon hearing it Lot went out to persuade his sons-in-law, "and he seemed unto his sons-in-law as one that mocked." They laughed at him, and took no heed, and presently he left the city with his wife, whose heart had become knit to all the grossness of the city; and with his two daughters, who had become utterly corrupted in the city. He lost his children, he lost his loved ones when he took them into the city. And every one

here that knows what that means, knows that when Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom, he was making a disastrous mistake. Better keep in the tent, better be old-fashioned, better be considered out of date, and keep hold of the children, than move into the city to get wealth and satisfy the greed of a covetous nature, if the price to be paid is the price of the ruin of the loved ones.

Yet let me ask him another question. But Lot, what did you do for Sodom? Surely you had a good effect upon the men in Sodom, you must have influenced them. Where are they? You went down to purify Sodom, to lift Sodom up, to lift Sodom toward righteousness and God and truth. You know the awful story. There were not ten righteous men in the city. The man that nearly saved Sodom was not the man who went to live in it, but that man under the oaks. He prayed for Sodom, pleaded with God for Sodom, wrestled with God for Sodom, and he received the divine promise that if ten righteous men should be found therein, the city should be spared, but they could not be found, although Lot had lived there until he became mayor. It was a disastrous failure.

He lost not only his peace and his children, but his influence.

And then the last thing. It is the meanest question, but I choose to put it last, and in this way. Lot, how much did you make? You know the answer. You do not want me to tell you. If you want to know how much he made out of it, go some day when you are on the other side of the ocean, to that brackish Dead Sea, whose lifeless waves lap the shore with an unending monotone of death. He lost it all, all he saved out of Sodom was his life, and he had to be persuaded to save that, for at last angel hands put upon his shoulders hastened him out of the city. He went in rich and came out a pauper. Now you see what I meant when I said, Here is a disastrous failure, a good man who wanted to be right, who, acting upon a wrong principle, took the wrong pathway, pitched his tent toward Sodom, came into Sodom, became chief magistrate of Sodom, lost his peace, lost his children, lost his influence, lost his very wealth at last; and we see him hurrying away, even as he leaves, himself so demoralised that he longs still for a city, and he says, "Oh, let me escape to Zoar, it is

only a little one." He went to Zoar, and did not tarry there, but found his way to the mountains, the caves of the mountains, and when in those lonely mountain caves, he has left behind him all the wealth and finds himself back again in the old place of separation from things that are evil, then it is probable that he begins to find his peace, and will finally regain something of his influence.

Now, surely I need hardly hold you another moment to say anything about the lessons. They are so self-evident. I want to press them home in the closing words. The first lesson, then, is, that there is no folly quite equal to the folly of self-centered seeking. This is the place to declare it. You will not hear that outside; that message is not preached in the ways of men to-day. It must be in the sanctuary of God, in the house of prayer, that this truth is repeated. Men are urged outside to take care of number one, to look after themselves. You can often tell what the world is thinking by its proverbs, its maxims, its little speeches. Take care of number one. That is a doctrine of devils. Said a man in my hearing, in one of the suburban trains in London some little while ago, travelling to the

city, speaking of a man who had fallen out of the line of success: "Well," said the man, glibly, "it is each for himself, and the devil take the hindmost," and that is the gospel men are preaching outside. Look out for yourself, each for yourself. Here in the sanctuary of God, I say that that is not true, that in those cases the devil generally gets the foremost, and it is the man who is self-seeking, and who chooses in life simply upon the basis of his own selfishness, who is going to make the most disastrous failure.

And the second lesson I learn from this study of the character of Lot is this. It is utterly useless to try and make compromises between good and evil. Lot pitched near Sodom, and did not at first go into Sodom. It was an act of dishonesty and hypocrisy. If your heart is in Sodom, you might just as well go in first as last. I have infinitely more respect for the man who goes clean in than for the man pitching just outside, and trying to keep up a sort of religiousness while his heart is set upon evil things. You cannot do it. There is no *via media* here. You must find a simple principle of life, and act upon it. You may try to pitch your tent near

Sodom, to keep up an appearance of loyalty to God, and get out of Sodom everything material and sordid, but it won't last. The man will soon get into Sodom, but at last he will be driven out, a pauper and a beggar. There is no failure more heart-breaking and disastrous than success which leaves God out of the bargain.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, you know it. You tell me to-day about men amassing wealth, and you say of that man, that he is a far-seeing man. How far does he see? Oh, he sees a long way ahead, and he makes his arrangements, and arranges for combines. If you think a man is far-seeing because he just sees round the globe and buys all the ships up, you are as blind as he is. The man who is far-seeing is the man who sees off the earth into heaven. If you are simply setting out in life to amass mere material success, fame created or position gained, then success will be the most dismal and disastrous failure. The far-seeing man is the man who takes up his pen and writes, "If the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." That is a far-see-

ing man, a man who has taken into account the spiritual things in his dealing with the material, the man who has taken into account eternity as he is passing through time, the man who has reckoned with the immortal, while tabernacling in mortality; that is the far-seeing man, the man whose choice is based upon the right principle, who talks only of everlasting riches, the spaciousness of eternity. That is the far-seeing man. If a man shall build the temple of success, broad and radiant and beautiful, if its foundation be earth and its capstone no higher than the atmosphere, he is a disastrous failure. If a man shall build his character upon the basis of truth, which shall find itself in harmony with God, then that man has made a success, though he never make a fortune, and never make a name.

Return in conclusion to this statement. The choice is not wrong, it is man's prerogative to choose, it is a proof of the majesty of his being. What are we to do? Choose upon a right principle.

In conclusion, go back to Abram, the out-of-date man, the old-fashioned man. When Lot made his choice, did you notice in the

thirteenth chapter what happened? When Lot had made his choice, and had gone, God said something to Abram. What did God say to Abram? He said, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art." "Thine eyes." Notice the force of it. A few moments before Lot had lifted up his eyes, "Lot chose him." God now says to Abram, "Lift up thine eyes." Which way is Abram to look? Look to the north, look to the south, and look to the east, look to the west. But that is every way. Exactly. But a man cannot look north and south and east and west without looking at what Lot has looked at. Exactly. I think I hear Abram say, I have lifted up mine eyes, and I have seen everything there is to be seen. Now says God, "All the land which thou seest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever."

But that cannot be right. Lot has that. Man does not possess anything except what God gives him. Did Abram choose? Oh, yes, before Lot did. What did he choose? Not to choose for himself, but to let God choose for him. That is the true principle of choice. You remember those oft-repeated

lines, the lines of Tennyson. Remember these are not the words of the preacher at his desk, but the words of the poet in his sanctum, the words of the poet looking deeply into the very heart of things, standing for no particular morality, the exponent of no particular creed, or dogma, or doctrine. What did the great poet write for us? He wrote this:

> "Our wills are ours, we know not how;
> Our wills are ours to make them Thine."

That is the philosophy of life upon which Abram lived. He had a will. What did he do with it? He willed to do the will of God. Abram, you had a choice, what choice did you make? I chose that He should choose for me, my law. With what result? Abram got everything. Let lost everything. Won't you let me press upon you these two principles of life? Will you choose upon a selfish basis, for your own gratification, which is to compromise between good and evil; or will you rather exercise your kingliness of will by willing that God's will should be supreme? If you will do this latter, what then? Then you will prove the truth of Christ's words, "Blessed are the meek"—the people that are not self-assertive, the people that do not set up them-

selves as the standard and criterion of desire —"for they shall inherit the earth." It has always been so.

Take the Old Testament narrative and go through it. Take the New and go through it. Take human history and pass along it. You will always find this so. The people who let God choose get everything, and the people who choose for themselves lose everything. I can well imagine that there was a day when the men of the world laughed at Noah. I have sometimes tried to imagine what the newspaper articles would have been like if newspapers had existed when Noah went into that ark. There would have appeared in all probability a column headed, "Strange Case of Mental Aberration." "Noah, our highly respected fellow-countryman, has at last culminated his folly by going into this peculiar structure that he has been building; and he is locked in; he has given up his land and everything, except his own immediate relatives and a curious but carefully selected assortment of living things." But there came a day when the only land-owner in the world was Noah. There came the morning after the deluge and desolation and despair and darkness that

Noah came out and the whole earth belonged to him. That is always so. Are you a little in doubt about it? Don't try and read all your life story in the appearances of these hours. Go back to history, and you find that it is always so. May God help you to choose upon the true principle, and letting Him choose, enthrone Him in the life, make Him absolute Monarch, handing over the reins of government to the King, flinging back the door of every chamber of the being, letting Him master you. Then will your life be in harmony with His will, the horizon will be set back, and the light breaking upon you will be the light that has no waning, the dawning of the eternal day. May we be delivered from the folly of Lot, and be brought into the wisdom of Abram.

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AUTHOR Morgan, G. C.
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R Greenwood
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